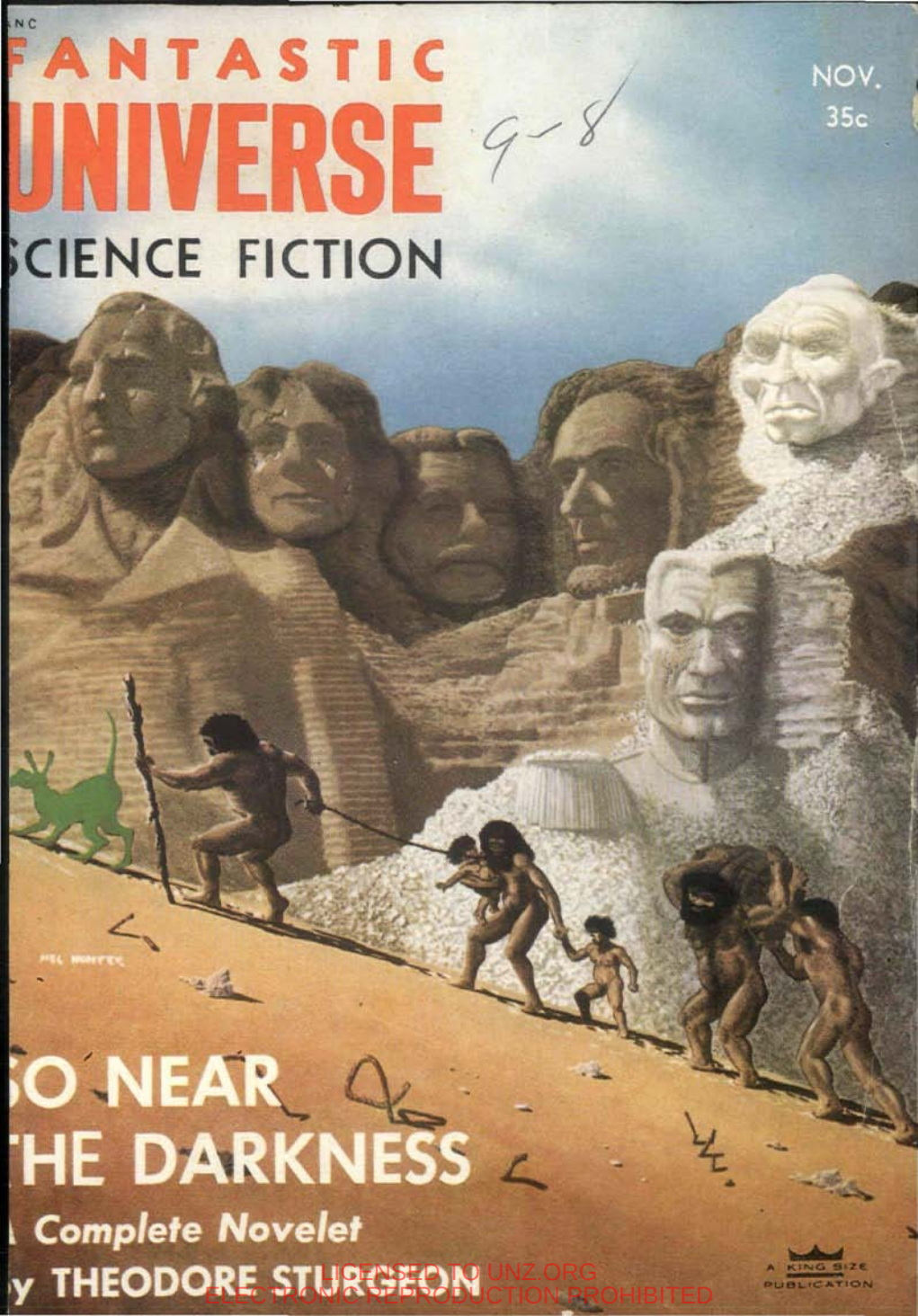

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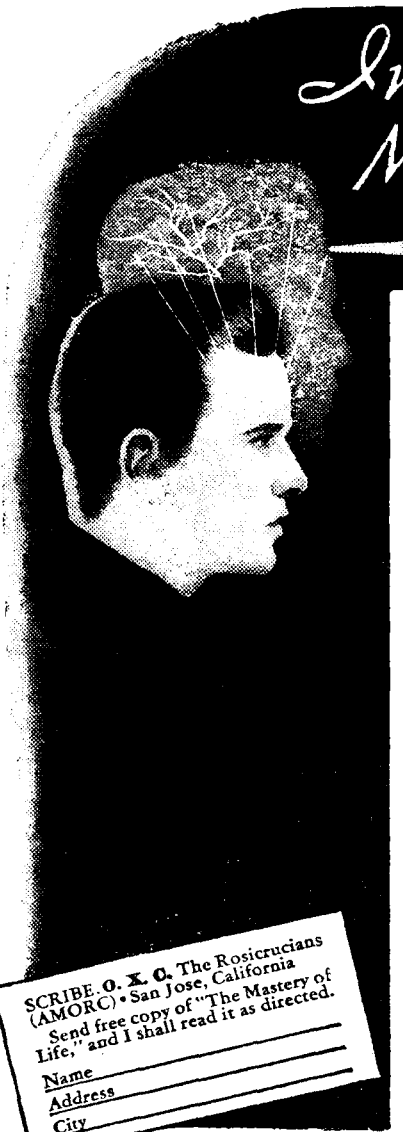

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FANTASTIC UNIVERSE

NOVEMBER, 1955
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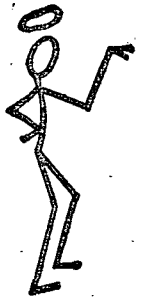
Have You Met THE saint

FANTASTIC UNIVERSE'S Famous Crime Companion



We believe it was Rudyard Kipling who once wrote, "The fields of fantasy are very wide," and so, we might add, are the closely related realms of science fiction and detective fiction. Each presents a challenge to the imagination, an invitation to leave the world of the humdrum and the commonplace, and fare boldly forth in search of the beckoning pot of gold at the crest of imagination's rainbow. And we feel that Leslie Charteris stands well in the forefront as an undaunted and ebulliently ingenious guide in such a valiant undertaking.

To our way of thinking THE SAINT DETECTIVE MAGAZINE is a natural. Certainly there is no more widely known and beloved character in present-day mystery fiction than Simon Templar, alias The Saint. And certainly there is no man alive more uniquely equipped to serve in a supervisory capacity on a mystery magazine than Simon's creator.

Currently a resident of Florida, when not engaged in traveling as the spirit moves him, Charteris has seen himself, wearing the guise of debonair Simon Templar, appear in scores of books and hundreds of magazines, in dozens of movies, on the radio and currently in a hugely-syndicated comic strip.

Make no mistake, Charteris and The Saint are oddly interchangeable—for like Simon, his author is casual and languid and manages to look like a Louis Quinze courtier even in huaraches and Bermuda shorts. It seems probable that Simon is actually the person Charteris sees when he looks in the shaving mirror. Apart from the two-in-one phase of his existence Charteris is an editor of shrewd and unerring taste. A sampling of the current issue—with a new Saint novelet by Leslie Charteris and stories by Carter Dickson, Hugh Wiley, George Harmon Coxe, Edgar Wallace, Cornell Woolrich—will attest to that.

We should like very much to add you to the hundreds of thousands of mystery-loving readers, from New York to Sydney, from Paris to the ports of Mars, who in recent years have become The Saint's avowed partisans.

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so near the darkness

by . . . Theodore Sturgeon

Brokaw's guilt and fear seemed more than human flesh could endure. But Tina could see the ugly bridgework behind the Dark One's fangs.

THIS IS THE story of a Chinese silver cigarette case, some vaseline hair tonic, a gooseneck desk lamp, and two girls—one nearly always beautiful, and one always nearly beautiful. It also may or may not concern a creature called Arrara, so named because of its peculiar snarl.

The girl who was nearly always beautiful had been christened Organtina, but when she heard a snide and subtle remark about it from one of the long-haired gentry in Greenwich Village she determinedly omitted the first two syllables. Tina was attractive in an almost miraculous way, and struck such a perfect balance in the color of her hair between blonde and brunette that one can only describe it as being the color of hair which is soft in the shadows, and breathtakingly bright in the sun.

Tina sold seashells in Chelsea, a fact which caused her considerable difficulty in describing her occupation whenever she became emotionally agitated. In her colorful little shop on the fringes of the Village, she displayed seashells and parts of

It was Theodore Sturgeon's genius for combining fantasy with science fiction, in a blend of enchantment rare in our age, which won him an INTERNATIONAL FANTASY COMMITTEE AWARD *in a year which saw an unprecedented display of competitive brilliance on library shelves. We doubt, indeed, if there is another writer of quite his stature in* both *genres. And now, for the second time, he appears in our pages, with a tale as darkly terrifying and as fraught with Novembral direfulness as midnight's frightful liaison with a demon moon.*

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seashells arranged and assembled into dolls, turtles and comedy masks.

She also conducted a flourishing trade in geegaws and a very special assortment of bric-a-brac and izthattas. The izthattas differed from the geegaws and the bric-a-brac in that the latter are unfunctional but pleasing decorative things, whereas the izthatta is a purely functional object. She loved both the izthattas and the geegaws and she made them as fast as she could. And so accomplished was her artistry that they sold like hotcakes. She knew because she had received comparative figures on hotcakes from Eddy Southworth.

The merchandising of an izthatta is very simple. You make up an object by cementing a razor-shell to a sea-snail, crowning it with a clam and spraying on some Paris Green. Almost certainly the next customer in the place will ask: "Is that a napkin ring?" or "Is that a paper weight?" or "Is that a salad-fork holder?" The correct reply should be: "I really like to deal with customers who show both good taste and insight. But of course it is! And this morning a lady was in—"

Your next cue is to laugh gaily while the customer reaches into her jeans for the exorbitant price of the izthatta, Chelsea being near enough to the Village for jeans on ladies to be *de rigeur*.

Tina's window displays were changed weekly, and brought in a lot of trade. Now it would be a spread of fragile coral-lace and crab-claws, largely labelled: SKELETON ART. (No mussels). And next week the display would be a highly abstract piece of business all made of urchin-quill and mother-of-pearl, captivatingly captioned: UNCONCHIOUS ART, without, of course, a conch in sight.

In the third week of a warm March, Tina was busily working with tweezers, cement, Swiss pattern files and a set of surgical tools. She worked in a small alcove separated from the rest of the shop by a curved partition, with a splendid assortment of her wares spread out under a gooseneck lamp of high voltage.

The opening in the partition between the workroom and the shop was small—but so was Tina. Her knowledge of a customer's advent was gained in two ways. First, there was the photo-electric beam which crossed the outer doorway, in such a way that its interruption would actuate a mellow chime. Second, there was a hole cut through the partition. The aperture was at her eye-level as she sat at work and it enabled her to see clearly everything that went on in the shop.

Imagine, then, her astonishment when she looked up from her work and saw through the peephole that there was a man in her shop. Eddy Southworth, whose hobby was electronics, had assured her that no one could possibly pass through the outer door without breaking the photo-electric beam. Yet the chime had not rung, and indisputably

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there was a man in the shop—a slender, graceful man with black hair like a carapace and heavily knitted brows.

Tina rose quickly, straightened her hair and squeezed through the partition. "Yes?" she inquired, confronting the intruder so abruptly that he recoiled a step.

"Yes indeed," said the man. He was young, and he had a voice like the middle register of an oboe. He looked up quickly and back to the showcase on which he had been leaning, the darting swiftness of his glance subtracting nothing from its thoroughness. Tina felt like a file-drawer from which inventory cards had been quite deliberately spilled.

"Would—would you like something?" she asked faintly.

She stepped hopefully behind the showcase, but to no avail. He promptly turned his back, to gaze up and across, down and around the shop.

"The old shell game," he said as if in amazement to himself.

"There was a time," she said pleasantly, "when I had only heard that once in connection with this business, which was founded by my grandfather. Is there anything—uh—inanimate here which appeals to you?"

"Oh yes," he said, turning finally to face her. He had, it appeared, disturbingly ironic eyebrows. "Where were you on the night of March twenty-fifth, two years ago?"

She stared at him. "Are you serious?"

"I certainly am," he said soberly, "I would really like to know. It's difficult for me to explain, but you must believe that it's important to me."

"I don't think I can— Wait now." She tilted back her head and closed her eyes. Two years ago. Of course. She had been in Rochester, and—"I do remember!" she said. "It's strange that you should ask me. I was staying with an aunt in Rochester that spring, and I had a violent quarrel which seems very silly now. I was quite the Girl Scout then. I was so angry I got my kit and headed for the hills. I didn't see a soul I knew for almost two weeks."

"No one?" He stared at her intently. "Think now. Didn't anybody know where you were?"

"Not a soul," she said positively. "And where were *you* that night, if I'm not being too curious? Just where, precisely?"

He smiled a very white smile. His teeth seemed to be pointed. "I *am* sorry," he apologized. "That was very rude of me. Would you like to make some money?"

Tina nodded energetically. "By selling seashells."

"I mean real money."

"How? By selling thousands of seashells?"

He sighed. "There's one thing I'm sure of," he said. "You are being stupid on purpose."

"I shall take that as a compliment," she said, and added, "I

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wonder how much more I'll have to take."

He laughed engagingly. "Your sense of humor seems to stay with you no matter what the provocation. I've noticed your window displays, for example. Laughing in the face of a business recession. You'd probably remain buoyant in the face of any menace."

"You try me," she said without inflection. "I rather think you'd be surprised."

The eyebrows tensed like the wings of a gliding gull. "Perhaps I will."

"What has my sense of humor to do with all this," she asked, meeting his gaze defiantly.

"More than you might suspect. I have a job to do, and I need a girl like you to assist me." He straightened, his long face all clear planes and forced patience. "Cigarette?"

He took a silver cigarette from his pocket and offered it to her unopened.

She stopped her head in midshake and took the case. "What a lovely thing!" she exclaimed.

"Is it?" said the man.

"Surely there can be no doubt about it. What a beautiful dragon!"

"There are seven dragons," he pointed out.

"Sev— Oh, I see. Two around the edge here, all curled around each other. Uh-huh—and one peeping around the pagoda."

"There are a good many pagodas around Peiping, too."

"Hey!" she laughed. "That was my line. Now, let's see— that makes four dragons."

"There are two more on the back," he murmured.

She turned the case over. "I don't *like* those. They look positively ferocious."

"They've been fighting again. But most dragons do look ferocious."

She looked at him quizzically. His calm, handsome face had grown, if anything, more sardonic. Recognizing that he was willing to let the impossible conversation go on until closing time, she dropped her eyes to the case.

"Where's the seventh dragon?" she asked.

Arrara-arrara said the case. It spoke softly, like a lisping child with moist red lips. Tina gasped, and closed her eyes. The case moved gently but firmly in her grasp, just as if someone were trying to twist it away from her. She trembled and opened her eyes. The young man was trying to pry it from her fingers. She raised it with a shudder of revulsion.

Arrara, said the case indignantly. The man said, "Shut up, you."

Tina said, "I didn't say anything."

"Not you," he said to Tina. "I was just thinking aloud, in reference to something else. Cigarette?"

"Thanks no," said Tina swiftly, her eyes on the case in horrified disbelief as it went back into the man's pocket. She wet her lips. The other dragon's inside, huh?"

"That's right. Now, about this

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little job. I can make it decidedly worth your while if you'll come in."

"I don't doubt that," said Tina, moistening her lips. "But if I should consider it I'd like to know in advance what it is I may have to say 'No' to."

"Well, it's like this. I have a friend who wants to get married, in a manner of speaking, and you're the ideal— Oh, see here now. Stop shaking your head like that."

"I can't help it. That 'in a manner of speaking' just about does it. Good-bye."

"Good-bye. My name is Lee Brokaw. I'm a dancer—adagio."

He looked her up and down and smiled. "Of course I didn't really mean 'good-bye.' I wish you would save both of us the trouble involved in my becoming insistent," he said smoothly. "How about dinner tonight?"

For reply she marched to the doorway and stood there. The photocell chime crooned from the back of the shop. She threw up a firm thumb. "Come along, little man. Actually, it's past my customary closing hour."

As if this were a cue, he nodded with feigned resignation and passed through the door. "See you tomorrow," he promised.

Shaking her head, Tina went back into the shop. She was sharp-witted enough to realize that she must depend for the support of her unusual trade on unusual people. Of these she certainly had had more than her share, from the gentleman who would buy no ornament at which his schnauzer would not wag its tail, to the woman who had three rooms of her house redecorated to suit a purple tie-rack she had purchased at a fire sale. But this Lee Brokaw character was strictly eggs in the beer. What *was* it he kept locked up in that cigarette case?

II

TINA HAD dinner with Eddy Southworth. He was an artist who lived and worked in the Village, but unlike most artists, he put in regular hours. He was locally well-known, and his works were considered delicate, tasteful and distinctly on the light side. He made flapjacks in the window of the Blue Tower Cafeteria, and anyone who watched his ambidextrous hot-cake-tossing knew that here indeed was an artist. Having dinner with him meant sitting across the counter, snatching phrases between servings, and filtering romantic comments through a mouthful of the *spécialité de la maison,* as follows:

"Hya, cinth."

"Lo, quacious." This was a routine, an intimacy, and a mental exercise. "Stack them with cherry syrup."

"Food of the Gods! How's it with you, Tina?" Before she could reply he was gone to the front of the place, to fill the air with somersaulting pancakes. On his way back with a batter-bucket, she determinedly clipped his elbow.

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"Eddy, what kind of a man could walk between a photocell and a light and not ring an alarm?"

"A ghost," said Eddy solemnly. "Or a vampire. Did you have one in the shop today?"

She nodded. "That's nice," he said, automatically. He went to the mixer at the back of the cafeteria and began to fill his bucket. "*What?*" he bellowed suddenly, and came back. "What about this guy? Did he wear a black cloak? Did he have a widow's peak, pointed teeth and a demon in his pocket?"

"No—I mean, yes. And he has a dragon in his cigarette case."

Her hotcakes arrived. Eddy sprinted to the front, tossed and stacked eight additional cakes, rocketed to the back and turned off the batter-cock just as the batter was forming a reverse miniscus. Then he peered over the edge of the bucket, and went back with it at a dead run, the bucket describing one single arc, like a pendulum-bomb, from the mixer to the griddles, without losing a drop. Someone up the line applauded. Eddy squirted a dozen discs of batter onto the griddle and came back to Tina.

"Are you kidding?"

"Ah thirtny am mot," she said through a hotcake.

"You just mean a wolf. Not a werewolf."

"Ath a matter of ah," she said, and swallowed, "he isn't. I mean, he didn't seem to be. He wants me for something, he says."

He nodded eagerly. "But he's not a wolf. You're sure of that?"

"I think," she twinkled—and it cost her an effort—"that he wants me for a fate worse than a fate worse than death."

She changed her mouth from a bow to an O, and stoked. Eddy picked up two turners instead of one, a sign of deep thought.

"What's with this dragon you spoke about?" he asked.

"It's in the most gorgeous silver cigarette case you ever saw."

"What does it do?"

"It goes *arrara.*"

Eddy jumped back. "Don't do that," he gasped. "For Pete's sake—"

"I'm sorry, Eddy. Terribly sorry. But that's exactly what it does. I—I'd like some coffee."

"Black with one!" Eddy bellowed. "Where does this apple tend bar? Or does he panhandle on the Bowery?"

"He's a dancer, Tina said. "When he left he pointed to the Mello Club and said, 'Look at that.' After I shut up the shop I looked. He's billed there—'Brokaw and Rapunzel, adagio.'"

"I'm out of grease," said Eddy to the waitress. "Tina, I don't like the sound of this guy."

"Yes, Eddy."

"See you tomorrow?"

"Yes, Eddy."

"Stay away from the Mello Club."

"Yes, Eddy."

So Tina went to the Mellow Club to catch Brokaw's act.

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The Mello Club was a cramped and crowded bistro in which the ceiling, having heard so many customers ask "How low can you get?" seemed to have accepted the challenge. The lighting was of a dimness to which the human eye could not become accustomed, because of its reluctance to recognize such atrocious color combinations.

The dimness was functional, insofar as the place had a function. It kept the customers in obscurity, so that each customer thought his own disgust was unshared, and therefore remained. It kept the customers' disgust from reaching the master of ceremonies while he created it. It suited the quality of the air, so that taint did not intrude. In short, a fine, healthy place.

Tina fumbled her way down the steps and into the club, sighted a gleam of brass from a trombone bell, pointed her elbow at it, closed her eyes and walked. She was small, but she had the directness of a destroyer escort. She brought up against a table not ten feet from the dance floor, which was, of course, two-thirds of the way to the wall. She sat down.

Hardly had she done so when the up-beat cacophony from the orchestra came to a screaming stop and the master of ceremonies came out, dragging with him a microphone with a head as polished and featureless as his own. Into it and the glare of a ceiling spot which painfully flooded him, he began to recite what had happened to him on the way to the club that night.

Tina rested her elbows on the table as the most comfortable way to keep her hands over her ears, and tried to locate Lee Brokaw in the babbling gloom. Occasionally she lifted her hands enough to find out if the emcee's droning obscenities were turning into anything like an announcement.

It was hot. Someone was breathing down her neck. She leaned forward a little and found herself breathing in someone's armpit. She leaned back again. It must have been then that the announcement was made, because suddenly, shockingly, the lights went out.

For a moment someone with the touch of a fly's foot seemed to be brushing a cymbal, and then there was not a sound from the tables. Slowly a blue-green light began to glow, so faintly at first that it could have been there for seconds before she noticed it at all. Gradually she became aware of a figure standing in the middle of the dance floor. The emcee? No, for he had been wearing a dinner jacket. This was something bone-white and slender. The light increased, or her eyes sharpened, and she suddenly saw that it was a girl, nude, splendidly if slightly built, and wearing some sort of a tall hat or—a crown. The light steadied, but did not become bright enough to show anything clearly.

The girl began to dance. There was no sonorous music, only a

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faint, flute-like plucking which she recognized as a melody played solely in the harmonics of a guitar. The girl moved slowly. She took two small steps forward, and then sank to her knees and touched her forehead to the floor.

The music stopped, but the heartbeat drum quickened as she straightened up again. There was a moment when it missed one beat, and the shock of that was followed by a blaze of yellow light and a painful, discordant blare from every brass in the orchestra.

Tina's aching eyes caught one brief glimpse of the girl's body as the dancer shook her head. Her crown was hair—real spun-gold hair that cascaded down and around her like water. She knelt there, head raised, wide blue eyes staring, arms up and out, cloaked in shimmering blue-green gold. And only then did Tina see Lee Brokaw.

He was standing behind the girl, looking down at her impassively. It was he who held her white arms up, with his long fingers around her slender wrists. Slowly he brought them together and grasped both wrists in one hand. She turned toward him and rose. Her hair was impossible—bewildering. It fell to the floor in a mass that was thick and delicate at once. It was liquid fire; it was smoke. It was like no other hair Tina had ever seen. She remembered the name of the act then—Brokaw and Rapunzel. *"Rapunzel, Rapunzel, let down your golden hair . . ."*

The music burst hoarsely into a travesty of the Apache dance. With slow, feline steps they moved about the floor. Brokaw's handsome, almost beautiful face held the girl's eyes. Her features were as motionless as wax.

As they danced, he took one of her arms behind her and apparently began to twist it. Her body stiffened and arched backward; and her head too went back. Brokaw bared his teeth in a frightful smile, bent his head and put his mouth to her throat. They danced that way for four slow measures, and when he lifted his head, the marks of his teeth were easy to see.

Abruptly he pirouetted away from her, and around her. She held her arms over her head, her hands touching his, her eyes glassily staring. The tempo of the music rose. Brokaw spun the girl to him and away, to him and away, as the music sped up to its climax. He stopped her in a final pirouette, both her arms pinioned behind her.

In a crescendo of noise and light, he raised his fist and smashed it into her upturned face. She dropped like a rag doll, and, as the cymbals crashed three times, and with his face as calm as a sunlit cathedral, he stamped on her head, crushing it flat.

In the silence and the blaze of light, Lee Brokaw stood up, smiled, and bowed from the waist. Then a woman screamed, and applause broke out in one great shout which changed to a roar of bruising palms

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and stamping feet. Brokaw bowed again, scooped up the limp collection of long limbs and golden hair, and tossed it over his shoulder. Sawdust trickled from the flattened head, and the clever hinging of one white elbow could be seen.

"But—she danced by herself!" Tina said aloud.

"In what kind of light?" said a man next to her, pounding the table. "And him in black!"

The thunder rose, and rose again as the lights dimmed to toxic obscurity. And finally Lee Brokaw came out to take a second bow.

He stepped out to meet the sudden spotlight, and as it fell on him he turned pale and clutched his chest. Something made the ringsiders shrink back from him. Something—the faintest of sounds.

Arrara . . .

"He's sick!" whispered someone.

A woman half-rose and cried, "His heart!"

"Has he got a heart on the right side?" asked the man next to Tina.

Tina said clearly, "He has a dragon in his cigarette case." But of course no one paid her any attention.

Brokaw bowed stiffly and went out. The chrome-plated master of ceremonies returned with his pasty-faced microphone, and Tina rose, dazedly made her way to the exit, handed a palm which materialized before her the cover charge plus ten percent, and escaped up the stairs.

The outside air tasted so good it made her sneeze. She was still shuddering inside over Brokaw's finale. She walked briskly homeward, and gradually the shock of that terrifying performance was replaced by curiosity.

What manner of man *was* Lee Brokaw? With an act like that, why wasn't he on Fifty-second Street? Or even on Broadway? Why, if he so casually offered that cigarette case around to chance acquaintances was he so profoundly affected when it growled *at him?*

How had he been so sure she would see him again? Did he have her figured so well that he had known she would be at the performance? Most of all, what on earth could he want with her?

Turning in at her apartment house, she fingered her cheek and jaw. Maybe he wanted a dancing partner who would spar a little and thus add a certain color to the climax. Of course, she had to admit that all that hair *was* becoming . . .

III

TINA UNDRESSED, went into her pajamas. She felt much better after that. She loaded her night table with sketching materials, a book on design, and two volumes of the *Encyclopedia Britannica* which had plates of shells. Two button sets and an izthatta later, she was happily asleep.

It must have been four hours afterward that she awoke. She opened her eyes very quietly, without

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moving. Something urged her not to start up, but to relax and look the situation over. The situation was Lee Brokaw's smooth, imperturbable face, slightly larger than life size. It floated, apparently, in mid-air between her and the opposite wall. It wore a gentle smile which ended at the cheekbones. The eyes were as steady and as deep as ever.

She said, "Wh-wh—" and the face turned chillingly upside down, got quite pink, then scarlet—a real blood-scarlet, as if it were looking at her through red glass—and then slowly disappeared.

Tina blanched and dived under the covers. In a moment one arm crept out and, feeling along the night table, turned on the lamp. She worked the blanket over her head and face, found an edge, doubled it into a sort of peephole, and peered out.

There was nothing to see.

She took a deep breath, held it, flung the covers off, bounded across the room and switched on the overhead light.

Still nothing. She withdrew into the center of the room and gazed slowly around. A movement caught the corner of her eye, and she cried out in terror as she turned to face —her own reflection in the bathroom mirror!

"Great day in the morning! Is that me?" she muttered, staring in shocked disbelief at the dilated pupils, the chalky countenance.

"Bad dreams," she told her reflection reassuringly. "Some way or other, sister, you're not living right."

She washed her face and went back to bed. She lay a moment in thought, then got up again and located a pair of nub-spiked golf shoes. These she put on the night table. Then she rolled over, tucked herself in, threw back the covers, got up, switched off the bathroom light, the overhead light, and, at last, the night-table lamp.

She was, by this time, much more annoyed than frightened. It had been many a moon since she had let anything throw her into such a dither. She fell asleep angrily, almost by an effort of will, and found herself in a fine technicolor nightmare involving a purring dragon which wanted to stamp on her head.

She came up out of it fighting, only to find Brokaw's glowing face staring at her again. This time she was prepared, and in a single fluid movement she let fly with one of the heavy shoes. The shoe struck the face right between the eyes. There was a loud crash and a torrent of profanity from the street below.

Tina turned on the light, peered around her, and went timorously to the window. She peeped out—no difficult feat since her shoe had passed completely through the pane and apparently collided with the head of the policeman who was standing in cold-eyed fury directly below, kneading his skull and looking up. He fell silent the instant she appeared.

She realized much too late that

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he did so admiringly. There was plenty of light behind her.

A policeman! She'd soon find out how Brokaw was pulling this little stunt! She'd slap him in jail until he begged for mercy and the devil called him Granddad! She'd—

Her brain raced. She'd do what? Say to the officer: "There was a face floating in my room and I threw a shoe at it and it disappeared and I want you to throw Lee Brokaw in the clink."?

Oh, no.

She turned to her empty room and screamed, "I'll teach you to come home at this hour, you heel!"

"Lady," said the policeman, "talk to him more quietly or I'll have to take a hand in this."

"I'm *so* sorry, officer," she called down, and then even more loudly into the room, "now see what you've done!"

As she left the window she thought she could hear the policeman saying sadly, "The poor guy. I wouldn't be in his shoes."

The following morning she arrived at her shop a few minutes later than usual. Not only had she overslept but she had been compelled to explain to the superintendent of her building that he had cleaned the windows so very clean that she had gone and stuck her silly head through one of the panes. She felt somewhat less than rested, and probably the least popular person in her cosmos was Lee Brokaw.

She opened the door, glanced around at her displays, and went back to the workroom. With grim deliberation she turned on the gooseneck lamp and the photocell, and settled down to work.

Then she saw what was inscribed on the black blotter to her right. It had apparently been written with the silver pencil which was bundled up with all the other colors at the back of the table. It said, simply, "Here I am."

It was written in a neat, possibly hurried hand, with fine lines and an even slant. It was almost a feminine handwriting.

"All right," she muttered. "Here I am, too." Tight-lipped, she picked up the blotter.

There was another blotter underneath it—a white blotter. On it, very much less than life-size, was the same face she had seen in her bedroom. It did not turn upside down. It simply faded slowly and disappeared.

Tina sat tensely watching the blank blotter, her hands achingly clasped. She sat like that until the blotter began to blur. Then she closed her eyes.

Aloud she asked herself, "Can I say it now, Tina? Can I, huh?" She nodded in reply. "Go ahead," she said to herself. "You'll feel better if you do." A pause. Then: "All right, I will. I'm really and truly scared, and I should never have listened to Eddy and I should never have gone to s-see that devil last night."

Tina realized suddenly that this couldn't go on. Either she got away

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from Lee Brokaw, Chelsea, New York itself—or she stayed. Going away was impossible from a business point of view and unthinkable from an ethical one. Then she must stay. But if she stayed, she couldn't just wait for something even more terrifying to happen. She had to smoke out the trouble. If things got worse, at least she'd know what she was up against. If things got better, well—that was what she wanted.

What to do, then?

Find Lee Brokaw, obviously, and get his story. Force him to talk even if she had to pound it out of him with a conch shell.

The chime sounded. She put her face back together and went into the shop. "Eddy!" she exclaimed, and hoped he wouldn't notice how close she was to tears.

"Hi, falutin'."

She forced herself to smile. "Lo, brow."

Eddy picked up an abalone shell and began toying with it absently. "How much were you kidding about that Lee Brokaw character last night?" he asked.

"Not a bit," she assured him.

"You said he was a vampire."

"*You* said he was," she reminded him. "All I really know is that he walked in here with some proposition that I couldn't let him finish, that he had a cigarette case which growled at me, and that he—"

"Go on."

"Nup."

He knew that monosyllable well enough to leave it alone. "Okay, let's take it as it comes. All you know is that he walked in here—*without* the photocell noticing him. He made you some offer which you insist wasn't what one would assume it to be, though you don't seem to know why."

"I just *know*," said Tina defensively. "Look, Eddy, if you think that Lee Brokaw is assuming the proportions of a deadly rival, you can think again."

"I'm not worried," said Eddy in an unconvincing voice.

"Eddy," she said thoughtfully, "what is so fascinating about Lee Brokaw just now? I've never seen you fret about anything like this before."

"I've never run across anything like this before," Eddy said. "I'll tell you what I know, Tina. Maybe a couple of things will clear up. Last night about half an hour before closing time, Shaw was in. You know him—manager of that smoke-hole where Brokaw has his act. He was in a fine froth. He wanted to know where Brokaw was. He stood up in a chair and yammered at the customers. Seems he had a second show in a few minutes and Brokaw was among the missing.'

"Any luck?" Tina asked.

Eddy shook his head. "None of the customers seemed to know anything. I remembered what you said and called him over. He told me that he had hired a ham act and that Brokaw had come up with

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something that wowed the customers. He was afraid that some competitor had bought him away, I think—though he pretended to be worried about the dear boy personally.

"I asked him what he knew about Brokaw—maybe we could locate the kind of place he might be found in. He didn't know a thing. Brokaw'd been in two days before and described his act and had done a short solo. Shaw never dreamed it was anything good."

Tina shuddered. "It was awful."

"Most of those acts are," said Eddy. "Anyway, I told him—what did you say? How do you know it was awful?"

"I saw it, Eddy."

"You saw— Didn't I tell you to keep away from there?"

"Yes, Eddy. You told me," she said, and her voice was altogether too gentle. "You didn't *ask* me, though."

"I didn't—Oh, I see. Little Miss Muscles can't be given orders, eh? All right, Tina. I'll stay out of your troubles. You can take care of yourself, and so forth. Only, when you're in up to your neck, don't—"

"I know, I know. I'm not to come yelling for you. Don't worry, I won't."

He went to the door. "I wasn't going to say that. I was going to say don't forget whom to yell for."

The chime sounded his departure. Not loudly, but with a faint tinkling sound that slowly died away into silence.

IV

SHE STARTED after him, then stopped abruptly and dropped her arms. Why did men have to be so pig-headed? Why did every man who got interested in a girl appoint himself as braintrust, bodyguard, and duenna? Just to top it, the men who liked her invariably said they liked her because she was independent and self-sufficient. She compressed her lips and half-snorted, half-moaned in aggravation.

The moan was answered from the back of the shop.

Tina froze.

The moan was repeated. It was not so much a moan of pain, though pain was there. It was a moan of desolation — of utter hopelessness and despair.

Eddy was only a half-block away. Perhaps she should—on the other hand, Eddy was an egocentric, puffed up creature with a dictator complex who wanted his women helpless. She'd investigate herself. She squared her shoulders and went into the back room.

There was nothing there but the moan. She looked under the settee and in the closet. Then she heard it again. It was outside, in the alley.

With some difficulty—the door was almost never used—she shot back the bolts and pulled it open. She looked to right and left. The noise was there again, faintly, almost behind her. She looked down

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a short flight of cellar steps. Near the bottom was Lee Brokaw.

"M-Mr. Brokaw?"

He started violently, staggered to his feet and shrank against the wall behind him. He was tattered and dirty, and his fine jaw was covered with harsh stubble. But none of this subtracted one whit from his incredible grace.

"You," he breathed, and his voice was still the mellow tenor she had noticed before. But now it was faint and frightened.

"What's the matter? Are you hurt?" she asked with alarm. "Come up out of there!"

"Will you take me inside where no one can see?"

"Come on. No one will see," she promised.

He tiptoed up, crouching, his eyes on her face. They were full of eagerness and hope, and a terrible fear. *He dances every minute,* she thought.

Every single minute.

He flowed around her and into the open door like a feather borne on an eddy of wind. "Lock it," he said, and while she complied he went to the partition and peered out.

"The chime will ring if anyone comes into the shop," she said.

"Will it?" he asked, and smiled.

Remembering, she said, "Oh." She pushed past him and sat at her work table. "Stretch out on the settee," she said briskly. "I can see if anything comes in." Why she said 'anything' instead of 'anyone', she didn't know. "Are you in trouble?"

He nodded, sinking gratefully back on the settee.

She stared at him. He looked so young, so tortured. The face was so different from the bland, cruelly smiling one she had seen in her room. But she could not deny it was the same face.

"I saw you last night," she told him, on sudden impulse.

"I know you did," he said, putting his hand to his breast pocket. "I didn't see you, though."

"Oh—the cigarette case! I remember. You don't mean it growled because *I* was there?"

"It did." He took the case out and tossed it carelessly into her lap. She recoiled, staring at it. She was afraid to touch it, even to drop it. But she had to know. She gritted her teeth, lifted it, and said, "I'm going to open it."

"Go ahead," he said, as if he had much more important things on his mind.

She looked at him sharply. His eyes were closed, and a furrow of concentration was drawing together the inner ends of his brows. She drew a deep breath and—touched the clasp. The case sprang open.

Of all the things she expected to find in that case—the little crawling horrors, the amulets, the runes on parchment, even perhaps the electronic gear that had so cleverly made the growling sound—what she *least* expected to find in it was what it actually contained.

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The shock of it was almost more than she could stand.

What she felt was the utmost refinement of the feeling you have when, in a dream, you mount ten steps where only nine exist. True, there was a dragon there. It was etched on the inside of the lid, but it was no more ugly than those on the outside, and it even wore a smile. Otherwise the case held, of all things—cigarettes.

"This," she said, when she could at last say anything, "is positively the last straw. Lee Brokaw, who are you, and what makes you think you can frighten me? Why have you done things you must know I would refuse to believe—and bitterly resent."

He rested on one elbow and looked at her. Again his eyes were unfathomable. "I am a dancer," he said. "If you tell me what you think I have done, maybe I can explain. I want you, very desperately, to do something for me. I want you, because you're exactly suited to the task." He spread his hands, as if to say, "Could anything be simpler?" and lay back.

"What is this task?" she demanded.

"You mean—you'll do it? There was sudden hope in his eyes.

Tina shook her head. "I certainly said nothing of the sort."

"I can't tell you about it if there's any possibility of your *not* doing it," he said.

"Well, then, drop dead or something," Tina flared. "I have a job!"

"You'll see me everywhere if you don't," he said. "At your home and at work."

"I've had a couple of samples of that," she replied acidly. "I could get used to it."

"It will get worse," he said, almost pleadingly, as if he did not want it to happen. "Other people will have my face when you speak to them. You will feel my hands on your face and your body. You will hear my voice when you listen to music, and later, you will hear it more and more until the whole world is filled with my voice and my face and my touch. You will go mad."

"I can keep you out," she said stoutly. "You can't walk through walls."

"Or through light-beams?"

Tina gulped. "I don't care what you do, or how much of it. You're crazy. I'm warning you now—there's nothing you can do to persuade me to do anything for you."

Arrara . . .

"Oh, please," gasped Brokaw. He swung off the settee and came to her, sitting at her feet with his easy, drifting motion. He took her hands in his long, strong, slender ones, and turned his face up to her. It was changed now. His eyes were wide with terror, and the delicate lips worked.

His voice was a whisper, shrill with fright. "That was the last warning. It will be sometime today, or tonight. Please help me, Tina—please, *please*. Only you can

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help me . . ." and he buried his face in her lap.

She looked down at his shivering shoulders, and thought of the calm strength he had radiated; thought of his symmetrical, unshakeable expression of objective power. Then her mind returned to the poor broken thing before her.

She stroked his sleek black hair. "You poor thing," she said. "I'll help you. You mustn't cry, Lee, you mustn't. I'll help you . . ."

He sprang to his feet joyously, and grasped her shoulders. "You mean it, don't you? You really mean it?"

"My specialty," she said through a tight throat, "is sick kittens."

"You're an angel," he said hoarsely, and kissed her. It was a surprisingly gentle kiss, just between her left temple and her eye.

"Now sit down and pull yourself together, Lee. I've promised. You'd better tell me what this is all about."

"I killed a man," said Lee. Keeping his eyes on her face he moved backward and sank down on the settee. "I killed him when he was asleep. I hit him with a bronze book-end and then I opened the side of his neck with a little knife. His skin was tough," he added, "and the knife wasn't very sharp. It seemed to go on for hours."

"I see," said Tina, holding tight to herself. She began to force a smile but decided against it; her cheeks might crack. "And it left you with a psychic trauma."

"I suppose so," he said seriously, ignoring the weak attempt at facetiousness. "But that wouldn't be anything by itself. I'd be glad if that were all. But, you see, after I did it, I had to get away, and I couldn't. People knew me. I was one of those noticeable individuals, I suppose."

"You are."

"Am I? Well, it doesn't matter now. I'm not what I was then. I've changed. I sold my—my soul."

"What kind of mad talk is that?" said Tina, straightening in alarm.

"Go ahead. Take it for granted that I'm a psychopath. But you're going to help me, and you'll see. Don't you know that there are more forms of life on earth than the ones you read about in the biology books? You deal in shells. You know the shapes and forms they take. You know the differences in the substances shellfish feed on. You know the peculiar variations that occur. Do you know there's a shellfish in the Great Lakes that makes its shell—"

"—out of strontium carbonate instead of calcium carbonate. Of course I know. So far this is my lecture, not yours."

"Please listen," he said, "I don't know how much time I have . . . There are creatures which feed exclusively on cellulose, and creatures which feed on the excreta of the cellulose-eaters."

"You've got termites there," said Tina. She was beginning to feel a little better. She knew enough

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about abnormal psychology to be able to pigeonhole some of this.

He ignored her. "There are creatures which eat granite, and lichens which live on them. But why go on? The world is full of this symbiosis, even in human beings. There are microbes living in us without which we would die. And I tell you that there are creatures on earth which can't develop a soul any more than a termite can digest cellulose. These creatures feed on the souls which we humans build!"

"That's at least logical," said Tina. "Even if it happens to be untrue."

"We can no more understand them and their motives and methods and hungers than can the hungers, and dark biological urges of a bass be understood by the intestinal microbes of a minnow which it may have swallowed."

"Very clear reasoning," said Tina, hoping that her mental reservation did not show. "How do you know that such a creature wants to eat your soul?"

"I promised it," said Lee miserably. "You've heard the tales of selling your soul to the devil. They're poppycock, believe me. What I promised to give up, though, must be called a soul, because there is no other name for it. All those legends are true in essence. Heaven knows how many people lose their essence, their vitality—whatever you want to call it. These soul-eaters are psychic creatures. The psychic pressure of —you may call it the ethics, if you like—of a true promise, is binding. They give you what you want, in exchange for the promise of your soul."

"That's a little nonsensical," said Tina flatly. "If they had access to souls at all, why don't they just gobble them up and have done with it?"

"Do you," he asked, his voice too patient, "gobble up a steak in the butcher store? No. You carry it home. You store it for a while. You season it. You cook it—so much on this side, so much on the other. You serve it. Perhaps you add a touch of salt, or sauce, or tabasco. Only then do you eat it."

"And what, pray tell me, are these psychic sauces?"

"Emotions," he said. "Fear. Humor. Terror. Disgust. Pity."

"I see. And you're convinced that you are now basted for the last time and ready to take out of the oven?"

"If you want to put it that way," he said, unhappily.

"Don't mind my flippancy," she said with sudden gentleness.

"I know why you do it," he answered, understandingly.

"Now," she said, "tell me all about this thing, and skip the theory. You killed this fellow. I imagine you had reason for it."

"I had," he said briefly, with such terrible emphasis that she all but tangibly felt the wave of hatred. "After I killed him, there was nothing I could do, no place I could go. I'd be seen leaving the house.

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I'd be remembered at the depot, at the airport. Sooner or later I'd be found.

"I was pacing back and forth in the library, trying to think of a way out, when I heard somebody cough. I was frightened out of my wits. There was a little man standing in the corner, smiling at me and rubbing his hands together. He looked perfectly ordinary. In fact, you see thousands of faces like that every day, and never remember them. The only thing unusual about him was his hair. He hadn't much, but, in that shadowy corner, it glowed.

"He told me not to be frightened. He said he knew what I had done, and the position I was in. He said he could help me. I believed him. I was desperate, frantic, ready to believe anything. He said that he could tell me just what I could do to get out of my trouble, and be free. He said I need never pay the legal penalty for what I had done."

Lee paused and moistened his lips. "I begged him to tell me. He played with me for a while, wanting to know how much I would give him. Finally I shrieked at him to tell me what he wanted. He told me. He gave me two years. *Two full years.* That looked like forever to me. I agreed. He got my solemn promise, and believe me, I was sincere. Then he taught me how to change."

Tina waited while Lee sat brooding. She realized that he was finished. "What sort of change?"

"I—don't want to tell you that. You wouldn't believe it. Nevertheless, I changed, and he kept his promise. I got away free, and came to New York. You know how I make my living. Of course, I don't push my luck. I think I could go to the top. I won't, though, unless I can live out the two years and beyond. I am morally certain if I can keep my—my—what it is he wants, I'll be safe from him and from the law for the rest of my life."

"Quite a tale," said Tina. "Now you'd better tell me how the silver cigarette case enters into it."

"I got it the night I promised," said Lee. "I—I can't seem to dance without it. I've tried, but without it I am no good at all. It seems to be just an ordinary cigarette case, but—"

"But indeed," shuddered Tina. "Still—I don't know. Lots of actors carry around a charm or a rabbit's foot. Tell me—what about those fantastic threats you made a moment ago?"

"I'm glad I won't have to do any of those things," he said. "You see, when the Eaters feed, they do not take all of a person's essence. The body dies, of course, and what they want is eaten. But there is a good deal left over."

"Bones and suet, kind of," she said helpfully.

"Kind of." He smiled, but she could see it was an outward smile

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solely. "That remnant still has a life of its own. Much of it is ugly and evil. I imagine most 'haunts' are exactly those left-overs, drifting around the places where they used to live and, depending on their quality, clinging to places where something bad has happened, or to the places where they were happy."

"Hm. And which would I be, if you haunted me?"

"If you had refused to help me, it would have been bad. Bad."

"Okay, Lee. Now suppose we go back to my original question. What must I do?"

"It's very simple. Just go with me when the time comes. You may not know what a remarkable person you are. You positively radiate goodness, and courage, and humor. Perhaps I'm hypersensitive, done to a turn—" he smiled—"but I feel it vividly. I get it from you, and I think I re-radiate it. I think that if you were with me, with your wry wit and your psychic strength, and if I opened myself to you, I would prove distasteful to the Eater, and he would discard me."

"Burn the roast, hey? Too much salt in the cabbage? Is that all I have to do? Stay with you?"

"That's absolutely all. And in the good clean outdoors, too, right here in the city. At the corner of Bleecker and Commerce. No pentagrams, no witch's brew, no dark caverns. You heard the cigarette case a while ago. I have until ten o'clock."

"You want me to stay with you until then?" she asked.

"It won't be necessary," he assured her. "What time do you close?"

"On Tuesdays, about nine."

"Good. I'll drop by—"

"No," said Tina, suddenly thinking of Eddy Southworth and the big, strong, misunderstanding feet he would put into this if he knew about it. Eddy would have to be stalled off. "I'll meet you at the drug store at the corner."

"It's a date," he said.

He got quickly to his feet, looking younger than he should with his stubble and his hollow eyes, and went into the front of the shop. She followed him with deep concern in her eyes.

"Aren't you afraid of whatever it was you were hiding from?" she asked.

He shook his head. "I'm not afraid of anything any more, thanks to you." He opened the door, and stepped gallantly aside. Urged by reflex, she preceded him through. The chime hummed. She stood in the doorway as he slipped past her. "I'm not going anywhere," she said. She realized only after he was gone that for the second time he had been in and out of the place without activating the chime. On both occasions she had just happened to be standing in the beam when he went out. She shrugged and went inside.

The store seemed unusually deserted, chill and spiritless, as though in departing he had stripped away its individuality.

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V

"I THINK I can," said Eddy Southworth. He called to the pancake artist on the early shift. "Joe! Can you hang on a little longer? Tina wants to talk something over."

"For you, no," said Joe, flashing a large smile. "For Tina, yes. Take your time, Eddy."

Eddy steered her to a booth in the back. "What is it?" he asked.

She began her reply with an apology. "Eddy, hon, I'm sorry I barked at you this morning," she said. "But if there's anything I can't stand it's some good-hearted bumbling *man* being protective and laying down the law."

"All right, Tina. I'm sorry, too. But I happen to be fond of you—all of you, including your neck."

"My neck?"

"The thing you stick out."

"Oh, that. Well, you'll see that I am doing nothing of the kind. This Lee Brokaw business is coming to a head tonight, and I don't want you messing around with it. Now sit quietly and I'll tell you all about it from the very start. Maybe then you'll see it's all right and let me handle it my way."

"All right. I'm listening."

She told him everything, from the face in her bedroom up until Lee's departure that noon. Early in the account Eddy began to sputter. She frowned at him until he stopped. Very soon afterward his jaw began to swing slackly. She stopped talking and aped him until he closed it. Finally she was through. It had been quite a recital, since her memory was good and her language vivid.

"And just what are you going to do?" Eddy demanded.

"Exactly what he asked me to do," was her instant reply.

"But Tina!" Eddy protested. "You're crazy! The man's a confessed murderer!"

"Which would hold up in court only if supported by the evidence," she told him. "And if there were any evidence, he'd have been caught. You know what passes for evidence nowadays. A trace of dust, a couple of hairs . . . No, I don't think there was any murder."

"Then what about this fantastic business of the face in your bedroom, and the cigarette case, and all that?"

"Those faces I saw—well, I told you about his act, Eddy. Why don't you jump to the conclusion that I'm a poor impressionable female when you have the chance? I'm quite convinced that I'm seeing things."

"I must admit it sounds like it. But why must you concern yourself with this at all? You say that Brokaw doesn't mean anything to you."

"Every human being should mean something to us, Eddy. Lee's a dancer—better than good. He's great. He's a very sensitive boy. He's gotten a weird fixation, but fortunately there's a very definite time limit on it. If my not being with him means that he goes off his

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rocker, perhaps permanently, I don't want it on my conscience."

Eddy looked at her with troubled eyes. "There is still one thing that troubles me. Why are you telling me all this?"

"Eddy, I've made my own way since I was a kid, and when I marry it's going to be because the man I love and a girl named Tina are travelling together in the same direction at approximately the same speed, and each under his own power. I won't be steered, towed, nor provided with an icebreaker. This business with Brokaw is for the record. It wouldn't do any good to tell you about it afterward."

He looked at her in awe. "Hi, tension," he grinned. "That was a speech!"

"I'm just telling you, Eddy—if I see you at the corner of Bleecker and Commerce Streets at ten o'clock, so help me, I'll never see you again as long as I live."

"You won't," he promised. "It's a quarter to nine now. Will you drop back here around eleven?"

"Sure, Eddy."

"Tina—"

She waited.

"Good luck."

She smiled, put a kiss on her fingertips and brushed them across his mouth.

When she had gone, Eddy walked to the front. "Joe," he called.

"Huh."

"I'll give you five bucks if you hang on for a couple of hours."

"Nope."

"Ten, Joe. This is important."

"Nope. I'll do it for nuttin'. I know when a guy's got trouble."

"Gosh, Joe. You're a real pal. If there's ever anything I can—"

"Beat it," growled Joe. Eddy did, clasping, in his pocket, Tina's key-case, which he had filched from her purse.

VI

TINA and Lee Brokaw walked down Barrow Street. They had spent most of the past hour in a quiet bar and Lee still had not shaved. He was reserved and apparently in excellent control of himself. He spoke in monosyllables. As they turned into Commerce Street, Tina slipped her hand around his arm.

"Do you feel all right?" she asked.

"I feel fine," he assured her. But he was trembling, ever so slightly. He walked slowly, gazing ahead, his eyes flicking over the four corners of Commerce and Bleecker. There were a few people around, but apparently no one was waiting on the corner.

"Maybe he's late," murmured Tina.

"He won't be late," said Lee. He looked at his watch. "Four more minutes."

One and a half of the minutes were used up in reaching the corner. Tina felt as if she were carrying a bier.

"Did you hear about the nudist

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who went to the fancy dress ball with an egg-beater over his shoulder?" she asked.

"No," said Lee, smiling. "What was he masquerading as?"

"An outboard motor," said Tina, and added wildly, "that's the whole thing in a shellhole. My brain is certainly working on all fours tonight."

"Tina, Tina, hold on to yourself. I'll be all right. Just as soon—" He broke off with a sharp intake of breath. Before them stood a slender little man with a partially bald head and a very ordinary expression on his face, who looked from one to the other of them.

"Is this the girl you were talking about?" he asked mildly.

"Here she is," said Lee, and viciously shoved Tina forward.

"Lee!" she cried, utterly shocked.

The bald man put out a hand—to stop her, to catch her, to ward her off, she did not know. She twisted away from him, almost fell, staggered upright. Lee Brokaw was sprinting away down Commerce Street. She started after him.

Over her shoulder she saw the bald man coming after her, a bewildered and anxious expression on his mild little face. She put on a burst of speed, blessing her good sense in wearing ballet shoes, and for a brief moment gained on Brokaw.

"Lee!" she called.

Suddenly something big and black leaped out of a doorway and shouldered into Lee Brokaw. Caught in midstride, he caromed off into a lamp-post with bone-shaking force. The shadow caught him up, pinioning his arms behind his back and lifting him clear of the ground, bore him grimly along toward Tina.

Tina tried her best to stop, but skidded past. Brokaw, dangling in that relentless grip, lashed his body about, biting and spitting like a cat. Suddenly he began to scream—terrible, high-pitched screams.

The man carrying him said gruffly: "This is the one you want," and flung Brokaw down at the panting bald man's feet.

The bald man bent and grasped Lee's shoulder. Lee screamed again as if the hand were made of white-hot metal. He screamed twice more, writhing and twisting on the ground, and then lay still.

The big man said, "Tina, are you all right?"

"Eddy! Oh, Eddy, Eddy darling!" She flew into his arms like a bird into a large tree. He put his face in her hair. "I told you so, you idiot," he said, "and I promise not to say it again."

The bald man said hesitantly, "I have a warrant here for the arrest of a suspect in the case of Homer Sykes."

"Never heard of him, said Eddy.

"Take me home, Eddy."

"I'm very sorry," said the bald man. "You'll have to come with me."

Through the gathering crowd loomed a policeman. The little man

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rapped out instructions about a radio car and an ambulance. Another policeman rounded the corner. The man gave him orders about staying with Lee Brokaw until the ambulance arrived. Both policemen saluted.

"We can walk," said the bald man gently. "It's only just over the block. That man, by the way, is dead."

Tina and Eddy looked at each other. Eddy shrugged. "You're the doctor," he said to the bald man.

They went to the police station. There were a very friendly desk sergeant and three very sour policemen and a triply sour matron. They went to work on Tina with a great deal of efficiency. They took her fingerprints, but not Eddy's. They just asked Eddy questions about himself.

Finally they were told to sit there and wait. They sat. Tina got as close to Eddy as she could without unseating him and asked, "We murdered someone called Sykes?"

He patted her shoulder. "No, darling. It'll all come out all right. Shall I tell you a story?"

"Tell me a story."

"Once there was a big lug who liked a girl who got into some fantastic trouble. So while she went on into her trouble, he swiped her keys and went on a pilgrimage."

"Tell it straight," begged Tina.

"Okay. Well, maybe I'm just incapable of jumping to as many conclusions as you. I don't know. Anyway, Brokaw's photocell beam stunt bothered me. I kept thinking about it until I suddenly hit it. I bought a flashlight and went to your shop. I turned on the rig. I found that anyone who wants to look for the cell can see it, and the light-cowl across the doorway too, for that matter.

"Now, if you want to pass a photocell without interrupting the light that goes into it, you shine a light into it, step through the beam, and take away your light. The poor photocell doesn't know the difference. Not a simple rig like what I built, anyway."

"I'll be darned."

"Then I don't know what you'll be when I tell you the rest of this. Here."

Eddy pulled something out of his pocket and dropped it into her palm. It was a ring of transparent plastic, slightly warped and sticky on one face. Around the edges were little curls of what looked like fused movie film.

"This little treasure," he said, "was stuck to the bulb of your gooseneck lamp. Unless I am quite mistaken, it had a disc cut from a color-photo transparency mounted in it. It was aimed at the black blotter. When you came in, you switched on the light, diddled around a minute and then sat down. The black blotter did not show anything up. The white one acted as a screen on which was projected a nice clear picture of your friend's pretty face—until the heat of the

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bulb ruined it. I found jimmy-marks on the alley window."

"But, why on earth should he—"

"Ask questions later. Listen. That projection deal woke me right up. I didn't even have to go to your place. That shoe you threw—did you hit the face that was floating in your room?"

Tina nodded. "Right between the eyes."

"Then what happened to the shoe?"

"It went straight out the win—oh!"

"Yes, *oh*. The face wasn't in the room. It was on that tight mesh-lace curtain you have tacked over the lower pane." He shrugged. "So, I went looking for some sort of a projector that could do a job like that. I went just down the street to the Mello Club. I got hold of Shaw, the manager. He's a slimy little scut. I told him I had something hot on Lee Brokaw, but I'd have to check his dressing room to be sure."

"Shaw didn't like the idea much, but he's so crazy to get a line on Brokaw that he'd give away his mother's left leg if he had to. He showed me the place. He crabbed about the lock on the door. Brokaw had had it put on. It was quite a place. You should see those mannequin heads that Lee made. I went through the drawers, and found what I was after. I swiped it. Here."

Out of the same capacious jacket came a specially built five-cell electric torch. Around the lens was a spring clip. "Here's a whole set of slides. Colored ones, and this." He handed her the glass disc. It was black, except for a spot in the center, which, when held up to the light, held a miniature transparency of Lee Brokaw's almost beautiful face.

"They clip right on here like this," and Eddy snapped a black glass over the lens. "Brokaw just aimed that thing at your window, and then, probably, tossed a pebble or something at the glass. He held it until he saw your light go on. After that he could probably see you."

She blushed. "He probably could."

"Shaw told me something else. He's a low little scruff, as I said before. I just stood there looking thoughtful, and he volunteered the information that he actually had a periscope—can you imagine it?—from his office next door, so that he could keep a dirty eye on whoever was in the dressing room. And he found out something really choice about our friend, Lee Brokaw."

"What?"

"I think I'll wait and let the sergeant over there tell you. He's bound to come up with it before he lets us out of here."

"How on earth did you get that gadget out of Shaw's hands?"

"This searchlight thing? Oh, I just said something about the back room. Those joints always have a

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back room. He was very nice to me after that."

"Eddy! You might have gotten into some serious trouble!"

He laughed. "That—from you! Well, after that I hightailed it for Bleecker and Commerce, and hid in a nice dark doorway. I don't know what would have happened if Brokaw had run up the other street. There goes the desk phone. Listen."

The sergeant picked up the instrument briskly. "Speaking," he said. "Yeah, we've still got 'em. You don't say!" Then followed an infuriating series of grunted affirmatives while he wrote. Then, "Okay. Soon's I write it up. There may be a couple more questions." He hung up, and began to write.

"Master mind," said Tina while they waited, "can you tell me why Lee did all those things?"

"I can guess," said Eddy. He leaned back and caught his knee between his palms. "Lee Brokaw, for all his skill and sensitivity, was the victim of a very real delusion—that soul-eater business. You, my child, were a substitute."

"Me!"

"Yes, you. He saw in you courage and humor. He probably felt he had the same. Perhaps he did. But he needed some more things that you had. The—what was it?—the seasonings. Fear, terror, disgust, pity. That's what he was conditioning you with."

"But how could he imagine that the soul-eater would mistake me for him?"

"For the same reason he thought the law would. He played it very cagily. That murder, now, was apparently a perfectly genuine one. He called up the police and tipped them off that the Sykes murderer would be at Bleecker and Commerce Streets at ten o'clock. I think he figured that the soul-eater, on seeing the surrender, would quickly jump at the first seasoned meat he saw that looked like the right one—rather than break his promise of keeping the murderer clear of the law. I imagine Brokaw was a little surprised to find only one person there—the detective."

"Unless that detective is also a soul-eater," said Tina brightly. "But Eddy, I still don't understand how he could dream that the soul-eater could make such a mistake."

"Sergeant," called Eddy, "could we be getting out of here soon? I'm supposed to be working."

"Oh, I guess so," said the sergeant cheerfully. "There don't seem to be much more to figure out now. It all ties up."

"Mind telling us why we were delayed?"

"I s'pose not, young feller. Seems like about two years back, this feller Sykes got married and killed the same night. They never did find the missus, and there wasn't a fingerprint in the place. It must have happened within an hour after they got to his place, and every fingerprint was wiped clean. Sykes

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had brought this girl from out of town. No one knew her. It was obvious she done it, but there wasn't but one clue as to who she was or anything about her. Even her license information was false.

"But there was one piece of evidence she didn't know about, or she'd have gotten to that, like as not. It seems Sykes sent a picture of her to his sister, and in the letter he said she had a great ugly mole on her back shaped like an angelfish. Well, now we know. She's been operatin' here for the past year and a half as an actor, ventriloquist, and dancer under the name of Lee Brokaw."

"Lee Brokaw is a *girl?*"

"Was, ma'am. Dead now. Coroner says she apparently died of fright when she was nabbed. What we held you for, young lady, is because you are the spit an' image of Mrs. Sykes, before she cut and dyed her hair according to that picture. If it wasn't for that mole on Brokaw-Sykes' back, you'd have a time proving you didn't do it."

"He—he needed a shave!" she said desperately.

"Phony stubble, ma'am. Got it right here in the report."

"Mad, mad, crazy as a loon," murmured Tina as they went out. "The poor kid. How on earth did she ever dream up this soul-eaters thing?"

"Paranoid logic, I guess," said Eddy, who reads books. "A persecution complex and an absolute genius for rationalizing it."

They walked in silence for a block. "I'm glad," she said, "that that soul-eater's hypothesis is rationalized. That was a pretty convincing—*awk!*"

"What's the matter?"

"Someone in that doorway," she shuddered.

It was dark there, but there seemed to be something . . . he pulled out Brokaw's flashlight and switched it on.

It gave a peculiar, dim light. Standing in the doorway was a mild-looking little man, almost bald. He was looking at them and rubbing his hands.

His fringe of hair glowed a ghostly green.

"On your way, I see," said the little detective happily. "A most unpleasant experience." He came closer. Tina shrunk away from him.

"Mind if I ask you," said Eddy faintly. "D-do you use vaseline in your hair?"

The man touched it. "Why yes. Why?"

"Ha ha, good stuff, hey?" said Eddy, and, scooping up Tina, he all but galloped away.

"It's all right, Tina," he said as they hurried. "It's perfectly all right. I still had that black disc on the flashlight. It's an ultra-violet filter. Vaseline fluoresces just fine under ultra-violet."

What he did not tell her, and what he sincerely hoped she would never find out, was that vaseline fluoresces blue, not green.

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back to normal

by . . . Richard Stockham

The Visemo had become an escape mechanism — quite as deadly as a distilled essence of cobra venom. But one man dared defy it.

THE VISEMO broadcasting center had been set for the night.

John Mallory stood quietly beside his desk, looking up into the darkness of the high-arching dome, which towered for half a thousand feet above him. He was a small man with a body that stood straight as a ramrod and eyes that were as bright as those of a cat staring into a beam of light. His rather gentle face was seamed with sorrow.

He saw the shiny steel runway spiraling up and up against the dome's blue-black roof. He saw the two thousand white, red and green button lights blinking on and off —and the thousand dial faces glowing softly. He checked the lights for correct patterns. Satisfied, he thought: *It's like the night sky and no one alive but me has ever seen the night sky. But someone must. But when? In my lifetime?*

It was at this moment he saw the massive steel door directly in front of him rising silently, like a portcullis. Instantly he faced it. Three men were entering the dome. Mallory recognized them instantly

When Isaac Asimov was very young he wrote a truly magnificent story about a society of walled-in cave dwellers cut off for long ages from the stars. When finally they did see the stars they went mad. That story has become a classic of its kind, and we seriously doubt if the splendor of its mood can ever be surpassed. But now Richard Stockham has come up with a more individualistic interpretation of the same exciting theme—one man against the darkness instead of an entire culture-complex—which we're convinced will hold you spellbound.

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—the Mayor, the chief psychologist, and the head technician.

Something's wrong, he thought. *They'd never just walk in on me like this. How much have they found out?*

He stood very still as they marched toward him, like generals on a deserted reviewing field, trying to pretend that a column of crack troops was still lined up awaiting their approval or displeasure.

The three men stopped ten feet away.

"We've come to ask you some questions," said the Mayor. Mallory noted the grimness in the man's heavy face and gray eyes and he was further disturbed by the stiffness of the tall, erect figure.

"All right, Mr. Mayor," he said slowly.

The Mayor seated himself at the desk. The psychologist came up and stood beside him. He was heavyset and short, wore a goatee and had dark, piercing eyes.

The technician, a bald-headed wisp of a man, was already moving up the spiral runway.

Abruptly the Mayor said, "Mallory, your family came to see us today."

With a stubborn effort of will Mallory controlled his surprise. "You mean," he said, "they left the house and actually came to your office and talked to you?"

The Mayor nodded, and turned for confirmation to the psychologist.

"They were on the verge of hysteria," said the mental specialist. "The visemo programs have failed to sooth them."

"My God," exclaimed Mallory.

"We went to your house," said the Mayor. "We checked your visemo receiver. It happens to be in perfect working order."

So they didn't find it, thought Mallory. *They didn't find it.*

"The people's only source of stimulation," said the psychologist, "is the visemo, as we all know. And in this particular city it comes from here—or it should. I would say, Mr. Mallory, there's a possibility that your family is absorbing emotional and intellectual stimulation from somewhere else."

Mallory sat down, assuming an appropriate attitude of dejection.

"The impending, almost certain tragedy," went on the psychologist, "of this one outbreak of hysteria cannot be exaggerated. One family has begun to break down. And yet they're supposed to be under perfectly-conditioned control. The ghastly aberration could spread to other families, and to other cities. That would be catastrophic. Our whole system of control would break down. You remember, of course, how the madness broke out before visemo, and what a terrible thing it was. It mustn't happen again. We're the first generation underground. Our discipline *must* be complete."

His features hardened. "You understand that, of course. You can't

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forget it. Memory of our life on the surface is a terrible burden to bear. But we've *got* to bear it. We've just got to keep remembering how much easier it will be for our children and the generations to come. Our life span is a hundred and twenty-five years. Sometimes I wish it wasn't. But that's the way it is. And visemo is our one and only barrier against madness. It's got to be protected."

He paused. "Mr. Mallory, your wife and, to a lesser extent, your two children were in terrible conflict this morning. They couldn't reconcile themselves to the two types of programs that have been coming to them over visemo. Now you spend your entire evenings watching, feeling, thinking visemo. Have *you* been in conflict over the programs at any time?"

"No," said Mallory. "Not at all."

"That's strange." The psychologist paused. "It could be, of course, that the programs were in perfect order while you were home."

"Did my wife describe any of them to you?"

"She tried to. But it didn't make much sense."

"What is it you want me to do?" asked Mallory.

"Just go home tonight. Be with your family. Watch the visemo. Feel the emotion and intellect beams. From this end, Mr. Evans, our technician, will check the visemo center thoroughly."

"I could check it," said Mallory, "better and faster." He thought of the hidden broadcasting set he had built into the massed wires and circuits and beams, high in the center's top. "After all I helped build the center. I—"

"Just a moment." The psychologist raised a finger. "We need an objective opinion."

"All right!" said Mallory. Then more quietly, "Suppose you find the center in order. Suppose my wife and son and daughter stay the way they are now."

The Mayor stood up. "In that case, it will probably be necessary to devise some sort of shock treatment or operation that will destroy your memories of each other."

Mallory felt a wave of despair sweep over him.

"Of course," said the psychologist, "if such a thing is done it will be quite painless. And since family ties are only a matter of convenience there will be no grief."

"I understand," said Mallory. "And now I'm to go home and watch visemo, as usual."

"That's right," said the Mayor. "With your family. You'll find them waiting for you in front of the visemo screen. They were given a mild sedative that must have worn off by now. They'll be watching one of the standard programs. Tomorrow morning you can report here at the usual time."

Fighting to control the trembling that was creeping through his body, Mallory moved across the great black-walled room. Si-

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lently the massive steel door rolled upward and he stepped out into the travel tunnel.

The bullet-shaped tunnel cars were darting past on their magnetic currents ten feet in front of him and the entire tunnel was as bright as day, stretching off to right and left like a mile-long glass tube blazing with radiance.

Now his dread was a stifling thing. In his mind, he could see his family waiting in the circular living room with the visemo eye staring deeply into them, and the emotion and intellect beams focused upon them. He had an intolerable mental picture of the beams playing all through their brains and along their nerves, probing into glands and vital organs with desires that became needs.

For ten years he had feared this evening. And now the facing of it was like a leap into darkness.

He stepped forward, breaking an electronic beam. One of the bullet-shaped cars stopped. Climbing into it, he pulled shut the hatch, and pressed a button on the dashboard. Immediately he was immersed in the floating speed with the white blur of the tube walls all around him. Leaning back, he closed his eyes, knowing that it would be ten minutes before the car reached the suburbs, five hundred miles out.

A century before, where the tunnel now stretched, there had been only a labyrinth of subterranean caverns rushing with rivers that drained into the oceans while the surface of the Earth writhed in convulsions under the rain of the great missiles. And now the people who had burrowed into those deep, empty places, preferring life underground to death on the radiation-saturated surface among the black craters were beginning to think and feel again.

It was a long time before the representatives of the huddled groups scattered here and there over all the Earth agreed that the past must be locked away in stone vaults so that man could begin again with what was native to his own mind.

So the books that lay about in the rubble, the works of art, everything disturbing and controversial was locked away permanently—philosophy, psychology, religion and history. All this, in each of the great city scars, was sunk deep into the ground in massive stone vaults, sealed shut—and forgotten.

Only the survivors' knowledge of machinery and science was left upon the face of the Earth for the people to build upon.

Soon great cities, five hundred miles in diameter, began to grow, one upon each continent—South America, North America, Europe, Asia, and Africa. The cities of the stone cupolas, they were called, each cupola twenty feet in diameter. Mounds of stone, they were doorless and windowless, and lead-lined, to hold back the radiation death. While the men toiled in their

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gray radiation suits the women and children waited deep within the ground.

The surface of the Earth had been killed, the scientists affirmed. And it would never come to life again. Man must live forever separated from the sky and the land. And, after many generations, the surface of the Earth would be only a place for him to explore, as he had once explored the depths of the oceans or the depths of space.

This would bring almost unendurable pain and sadness to the first generation, which could remember, and to the next, which would share vicariously the longing from their parents as they listened to the stories of how life had been lived under the sky. But the memories would eventually die and the stories would become myths and man would adjust to his environment.

And after many years, the cities were finished. The cities with the tunnels for streets, below the cupolas, and the people living like ants, never knowing the night and day sky, never knowing the live growing things upon the Earth, never feeling the push and buffet of wind nor the driving wetness of rain nor the warm press of sun.

Only the stone cupola cups with the people sitting and waiting now that the work was done.

Waiting for what—with the silence and the sitting and the wondering? The answer was, of course—the machine. The machine tended gardens, below the cities, and parceled out food. The automatic, self-repairing sewing machine turned out clothes, and the exercise machine kneaded and rolled, pushing and pulling.

The doors of the cupolas opened at the approach of a shadow and the bullet transportation cars flashed along the shining tunnels, whisking the people from place to place where they talked and talked endlessly of the clothes and the food, and of the waiting, and the wondering. Where were they going and why? Where, where? The twenty-second century miracle cities were stocked to repletion with comfort and security pressed down and running over.

And then one day a man clawed at the walls of his cupola and another sank into an endless lunatic trance. Others cried out against the stillness, pleading with the circling tunnels to straighten, and ran yelling and stumbling all through the intolerably safe labyrinth of the cities.

There arose then a need for something new and different that would restore sanity to the restless and despairing.

There were a few men and women who remembered the old days of television, to whom the fundamentals of these old machines were still a treasured legacy from the times of the exploding missiles and the self-exile of millions in the underground caverns.

And so these few brought back

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the ancient television sets and the broadcasting centers, as they had been before the great devastation of the Hydrogen Wars. And when the people watched television they no longer pounded the walls of their cupolas or wandered, shocked and staring, along the tunnels of the cities.

The new technicians added to the old television. They added emotion and thought beams—third dimension and stereo-sound. They added the screen that curved around three walls of the room and color and taste and touch.

And with each addition, the people in the cities grew quieter. They sank back listening and watching, enjoying to the full the splendors of sight and sound, of thinking and feeling, which the great curving screens brought to them.

A contest was held over all the Earth then to find an inspiring name for this new savior of humanity.

The name chosen was visemo.

And so the madness was subdued and held in check.

II

JOHN MALLORY opened his eyes. The tunnel light engulfed him and the bullet-shaped tunnel car seemed to hang poised in the darkness. Yet he could sense its terrible speed.

And he remembered.

He could remember back to the night before the visemo was conceived, before even the ancient television had been revived. He had been one of those who had felt themselves sinking into the madness, the insatiable craving to see space out beyond the winding tunnels of the city. Yet he had struggled within himself, desperately, to hold at bay the awful thing that had happened to him.

And while he walked through the endless winding tunnels, his eyes on the gray walls pressing in upon him, he knew that he must find some way of escaping into whatever lay beyond, even if his daring led to his death.

So John Mallory, electronics expert, machinist, physicist, mathematician, conceived and fashioned a cutting instrument that could open up the walls. He perfected it as the other men were frantically endeavoring to keep the people from even thinking about what lay beyond their safe stone and steel labyrinth.

Then late one night, while his wife and his two children lay asleep, he held the finished instrument in his hand. It was a disc—a simple circle of steel with a white button in its center.

As he looked at his invention, he wondered how it had happened that he alone, of all the people in the city, had decided that he must go out on the surface of the Earth and had logically discovered a means of doing so.

But he could not *know*—just as the first man who had used fire could not have known—why such

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a discovery had come to him. Or the first man to conceive the bow and arrow, or trace out the crude outlines of a bison on the walls of a cave.

A feeling, a drive, an inner need, simply translated itself into action because that was the way it had happened. And who could know the *why* of it?

And so John Mallory had put his philosophical problem aside. He stepped close to the wall and held the disc against it. He pressed the little white button. A beam from the disc thrust through the wall, instantly dissolving the molecules of lead and steel alloy and concrete. He moved the disc from the floor up in a half circle and down to the floor again. A piece of the wall fell outward.

He crawled out on the quiet Earth under the blue-black sky with the spread of stars broad and deep above him and the air cold and fresh in his nostrils. He stood for a long time letting the cleanness and freshness and the wide expanse of wonder soak into his starved body and mind.

At last, with twenty minutes left of the forty-five minutes allotted to him before the saturation of the radiation death, he began to walk, checking the time, ten minutes out and ten back. And just as he was becoming deeply aware of the swinging, rhythmic motion of himself across the Earth, he suddenly felt a jolt of hardness under his feet.

Bending down, he found the great slab of concrete, the top of the vault that held the ideas that argued with each other. An immense storehouse it was, containing in its shadowed recesses works of philosophy, psychology, and religion—and all the vanished splendors of music and art.

Using the tool that had opened the cupola wall, he made an opening in the stone roof and let himself down into the great cavern.

He stood there, swaying in wonder and staring at all the creative accomplishments of man's mind, and heart.

Suddenly, when he touched his timepiece and realized that he had overstayed his time an hour beyond the safety margin of the radiation death, he sank down and prepared to die. But death did not come and he knew then that the radiation no longer rose dangerously from the Earth.

And so, through the years, he returned at night into the vault and became lost in contemplation of the paintings, the music, and the sculpture. He let the ideas and the excitement from the books open up within him like a bright, many-petaled flower. He took many of the books home and hid them and read them at night while his family slept.

He read of how man had blasted into radio-active dust the cities that he had built with such daring and creativeness; read how he had killed the living surface of the Earth

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and burrowed deep into the drained subterranean caverns and tunnels and had waited for he knew not what, shivering in fear.

He read too of how terrified humanity had buried its past as it might have buried a body that had been murdered in a blind fury and had sunk it deep so that it could no longer haunt the dreams of the living.

Suddenly now, Mallory was conscious of the lighted tunnel and the bullet travel-car floating motionless. Opening the hatch, he stepped out onto the concrete platform and walked down a passageway, past the many doors that opened into the long line of cupolas.

As he walked, he remembered how he had often seen his wife, Helen, and Mary and Bob, his children, absorbing without any real understanding the sights from the visemo eye, and the thoughts from the beams that played so relentlessly upon their brains and nerves. He remembered the pain of fighting the hypnotism of the beams, while he watched with horror the minds of his wife and children floating away from him, like swimmers on a dark lake.

When he realized that they would eventually lose their identities in the great eye of the visemo receiver, he knew he must struggle to save them. So he searched within himself for a weapon and, after many months, he knew that there was only the machine itself left for him to fight with.

For many hours and weeks he went out at night upon the Earth and walked. He thought of the tasks that still lay before him, like some awful deed. He thought of the weight of his duty and searched within himself for the strength to endure it.

Only a machine was left to use as a surgical instrument to cut away the scars of deadness and blindness from the minds of his wife and children. And if he were able to succeed? What then? Could there be any real hope or freedom for just the four of them out upon the Earth, living the life of the Earth, with the others left deep within the deadness of the tunnels and the cupolas?

Just life for himself and his family, and everlasting despair for the others? He knew then that he must save them all. The others too had to be given a chance to live again. And only he could give them that chance.

An idea had come to him and there was a something in himself which demanded that he pass it on to them.

And so the choice was made, and his secret work began.

There were weeks and months of it—a labor that centered about the secret building of the tiny visemo broadcaster and receiver, while he was alone during the day in the visemo broadcasting center. The tiny broadcaster was woven into the very wires and currents of the visemo center, and the tiny

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receiver was moulded at night in his house, while his family slept, into the intricate internal mechanism of the visemo receiver.

And finally the work was done. He was ready with the pictures of the food and the million things being dissipated, first for moments and then for minutes, in the great broadcaster. He was ready too with the pictures of the old plays and the works of art and literature that he had found in the sunken concrete room, which would be run through the tiny broadcaster, picked up by the tiny receiver and transferred into the visemo eye and the thought and emotion beams, and from them into the minds and hearts of his wife and children.

Mallory stopped before a door that was like all the others in the long line of doors.

Silently it slid back and the room opened up before him. He saw the dimness, and the flickering colored lights which were reflected on the walls from the half circle of screen. He saw the emotion and thought beams playing gently on the three figures sitting there before him.

He stopped just inside the door. It closed quickly behind him. His wife and the children did not look at him.

Instantly he felt a surge of desire to *buy*. To buy the black velvet dress, skin tight at its top, and flowing full and swinging to the ankles. It was being modeled on the screen by a tall willowy girl with silver hair and a rarely beautiful face.

"Buy it," the smooth round tones said. "Buy it. Rejoice in the soft flowing silkiness, the clinging satin caress and the heady perfume instilled forever in the texture of the cloth. Buy it."

Buy it for his wife.

The desire engulfed him.

And at that moment his wife saw him. Rising she said, "Oh, John, I've *got* to have it." She was a thin, graying little woman, in late middle age. Her movements were sparrowlike, her face and eyes intense, expectant.

He did not move or speak.

The girl jumped up. She was a child, trembling on the verge of adolescence. "Get it for her daddy," she pleaded. "Please."

And the boy, a mid-adolescent, urged, "You've got to get it, Dad."

Then both children sat down, watching the screen again.

Mallory felt a dizziness. *My God,* he thought, *they've tripled the power at the center.* He sank into a chair.

Now a picture of a broiled chicken and a jelly omelet with coffee and toast appeared on the screen. He could smell the crispness and the aroma. A man and woman sat at the table on which the meal reposed and began eating, ecstasy in their faces.

Instantly Mallory experienced intense hunger, as though he had not tasted food for hours. Glancing at his wife, he saw her moisten her

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lips. He saw the boy rub his mouth and then gently press his stomach. He saw the girl swallow hard and squirm in her chair.

His wife said, "Tonight. We'll have it tonight, for dinner. She turned to Mallory. "John, press the buttn to the food center."

"I'm starved," said the boy.

"Me, too," said the girl.

Mallory shuddered, stepped to the wall, and turned a redly glowing knob on the visemo's tuning dial. Instantly the room became silent and dark.

"John!" exclaimed his wife. "What have you done?"

He waited a moment. Then, as he heard Mary and Bob stirring, fright in their movements, he grasped a blue knob, and gave it a full turn.

Music flowed into the room, and the screen was filled with the picture of a Negro woman, her eyes closed, singing *Ave Maria.* The deep richness of her voice rose and fell, vibrant with the feeling of dusk and dawn, the passing of the seasons, and the growing life of all things. There was warmth and well-being in the glowing voice tone, and beneath the ebb and flow of the softly crying strings throbbed pain and grief and longing.

Mallory watched the faces of the three. His wife, stared in silence at the screen, her mouth tight. The boy watched with his eyes open wide. Mary was smiling faintly, losing herself it seemed in the flow of sound and in the dark, sad face of the singer.

Just to see Mary's face, thought Mallory, *justifies all the years of waiting.* He sat down.

The movement startled his wife. "I can't stand it," she said.

Bob jumped to his feet. "What program is that, Dad?"

Mary said, "It's beautiful. It's so beautiful."

"Turn it off," said Helen.

Mallory pressed the blue button. The voice died, and the screen became a dark half circle of wall.

"Now turn on the other picture." His wife's voice was trembling.

"No, Helen, I won't," he said quietly.

"Why?" she demanded.

"Because I can't stand it anymore," was his firm reply.

She shook her head. There was a wildness in the motion. "I've got to know what's happening to us. If only we could be quiet and happy again! But we don't know what happiness means anymore. Why can't we just get back to the way it was before the children were born. The pictures were so peaceful then. They were all about the food and the clothes and the refrigerators. They were all about the new furniture and how the styles had changed—just peaceful news about how people had everything they needed.

"And then the pictures began to be different. Now and then—just for a minute. Like the pictures we saw this morning. And

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slowly the changed pictures became more frequent. But they were coming from the center. That convinced us they must be all right, and we accepted them. Then, as time went on, I began to feel uneasy about them and later a little bit excited. Then I became terribly excited. And then for the first time, this morning, I couldn't stand the pictures changing back and forth."

"We were watching a food program, for the lunch menu. It was demonstrating a new way to cook beef stew, different from anything we'd ever even imagined before. We got so hungry that I reached out to press the food button. Then the picture changed, the way it always does. A man was talking. He said something about the oceans and the crash of water on rocks. The picture was still, but he talked about the movement in it. Another picture showed a big dark rock and at the bottom it was green. The voice talked about bushes and trees and the sky and a mountain.

"I just remember the words. And there was another one all blue-black with dots of white and strange-looking square structures and at the bottom it was green, too. The voice talked about bushes and trees and the sky and a mountain again. I just remember the words."

"You've seen pictures like this before," Mallory said quietly.

"Yes," his wife acknowledged. "But they made me feel different this time. It was as if two awful forces were pulling me in opposite directions, as if I were being torn apart. I had to do something. So I told Mary and Bob to get ready and we'd go to the psychology center. It's what we've always been told to do if we ever felt sick."

Mallory stood very still, restraining an impulse to go to her and comfort her. Never before in their lives had there been the need for comfort or sympathy between them. But only he could understand her need now, from the books he had read and from his own yearning for sympathy throughout the long years. She wouldn't understand, he told himself. She would feel only shock and fear.

As he started to speak, he felt Mary's hand brushing his sleeve. Bob moved to the side of his mother and stood there quietly, as though he had lost something.

But the children understand, he thought—instinctively. Visemo hasn't saturated them yet.

He smiled wryly. "I know what they said to you, at the psychology center. They told you that many of the broadcasts you were getting weren't sanctioned by the control board. They said somebody was feeding you mental and emotional poison."

She nodded.

"It's true," he said, "about some of the broadcasts not being sanctioned. They weren't. I'm responsible."

Helen covered her face with her hands.

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"But it's the sanctioned broadcasts that are the mental and emotional poison," he said.

"I don't know what to believe. I don't know."

"Look, Helen," he said. "I've got to show you—tonight. I've got to explain."

"They said I was supposed to spy on you. They said you might be—"

He looked at her. "Insane?"

"Yes."

"But you can't spy on me," he told her, gently.

"I want to," she said. "But at the same time I want to—to help you. I want to comfort you if you're sick. But some of the pictures on visemo seem to be saying nobody can be sick and others show people helping the sick. Some of the pictures show people being unhappy, and others make us forget all that and show people always happy. It's as if the pictures lie to each other. And—I feel the same way, as if I'm lying to myself."

"You've never wanted to help anyone *before*, have you," he asked.

For a long moment she thought. Then she shook her head. "No, I never have."

"But now you *want* to help me."

"Yes. In a way. I—"

"Wait." He held up his hands. "Your *yes* is true. That's enough. I desperately *need* your help. Sometime this evening—it could be any time—the Mayor and the psychologist will come into this room to see how the stepped-up power of their broadcast has affected us. What they see will decide whether we will be allowed to go on together or be separated forever and changed into other people . . . I want us to go on together."

Mallory could feel his daughter moving closer to him. He watched with concern his wife sink into a chair in indecision, while his son knelt solicitously beside her.

"Before the Mayor and the psychologist get here I want to take you out on the surface of the Earth," he said.

"But it's—it's death on the surface," exclaimed Helen, alarm in her voice.

He rose, walked to the far end of the room and knelt down. He took the disk of metal out of his pocket.

"A long time ago, I made this torch," he said. "It dissolves the wall in a thin line, wherever I place a mark. It's very much the same as drawing a pencil line and where the line is, there's space. I made a door here in this spot—leading to the outside. I've gone out on the surface of the Earth for many years. And I'm still alive. When I came back, I set the section of wall in place again. Then I changed the instrument and sealed the wall shut."

"You mean, said Helen, awe in her voice, "you've been going out here at night while we were asleep?"

"I *had* to see the outside," he

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told her. "Man has walled himself away from life and beauty. He's imprisoned his mind and feelings in the cruel iron walls of the visemo." He nodded, "I had to show you more than this living death. I had to bring you out under the sky."

Mallory knelt down and ran the instrument around a three-foot square area in the wall. The piece of stone, lead and metal, remained stationary for a long moment. Then it fell outward.

Instantly Mary scurried toward the oval of darkness.

"No!" Helen cried out in frantic warning. "No!"

The girl stopped, looking defiantly back over her shoulder.

"All you'll find out there," said Mallory, "is beauty and freedom. And the sky and stars!"

"But I'm afraid," said Helen. "I don't know—"

Then Bob said, "Dad, I can smell the freshness." He bent down, staring out into the night. "I can see dots of light up toward the top."

"All my life," said Helen, her voice seeming to come from a great distance, "I've been here—inside the city. I was told never to leave and I was happy here. We can turn on the visemo and watch it and—forget about out there. We'd be happy again."

Mallory shook his head, and stepped back from her.

"There's something I've got to say. I suppose if I had dared to say it before I'd never be able to say it now. I'm going out there—and if I go alone I won't be back."

He turned to the boy who was looking from him to his mother, a frantic longing growing in his face. The girl reached out and took Mallory's hand, holding it tightly. The woman was staring at the floor.

Mallory felt the small hand tremble faintly, as though his daughter were anticipating a leap. Gently he tightened his grasp on her hand, bent down and stepped out into the night.

III

As MALLORY straightened up, he heard Mary's breath catch in her throat. Looking down at her, he saw the moonlight bright on her face. Incredibly her face seemed to be floating in space, just below his shoulder. Her eyes were wide, reflecting pinpoints of light, and her lips were barely parted and her breathing was quiet.

She said, "Oh," and was silent again, her slight body moving across the swirled ocean of light points. Slowly Mallory turned his eyes to the oval of light in the cupola wall. It was empty.

He saw a lighted oval of grass glistening with drops of dew. At the same time, he was aware that Mary was staring in silence and wonder at the tangled treetops black against the moon-washed sky.

He had been sure at least that

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his son would follow. He could not go back to a house that could never be a home. And he could not continue on. Not with just Mary. How could he abandon a woman and a boy whom he loved more than his own life in the cupola.

Then suddenly he saw Bob, a shadow with the light at his back, kneeling in the opening. The next moment, he was standing beside his father.

After a long time, he said, "It's—like being in a big room. You can't see the walls, but you know they have to be there." And then he too was watching the depth of the night sky.

"What was your mother doing," Mallory asked, "when you came out?"

"She was just standing, looking down at the floor," Bob said. "I'm going back in a few minutes." His voice trembled on the edge of crying. "Are you really going away for good, Dad? Will you take Mary with you?"

Mallory held his eyes on the oval of light. "I don't know, son. I thought she'd come out with us. I was almost sure of it."

"She won't," said the boy. "She's too scared. You can't blame her, Dad. I was so scared coming out I thought I'd faint. And now it's—so wonderful. But I've got to go back."

Mallory was silent. He could tell himself that his wife, back in the room, had made her choice and that her decision had been inevitable. He could tell himself that she had chosen to stay in the narrow prison of the city, caught in the death trap of the visemo. Surely it was better that a man and his children should be alive under the sky than imprisoned with the living dead in a tomb of walls sunk deep into the ground. But the struggle within him raged unabated.

He looked deeply into the darkness among the silent trees under the silent sky. Why could he not summon the courage to seal the opening quickly, before that fierce inner struggle left him standing on this one spot forever.

As he bent down to lift the displaced piece of wall into place, Helen's shadow fell abruptly across it. And then she was in the opening, the darkness and the moonlight on her pale face.

Gently he said, "Helen," and reaching down, grasped the hand which she held up to him.

As she stood beside him, he could feel her trembling. She raised her face to the sky, a wild surmise in her eyes. "I had to come," she said. "I couldn't go on living without you."

"We—wouldn't have left you," he lied.

"After you'd all gone and I was standing there alone, I seemed to feel the walls pressing against me. The whole house felt dead. It was as if you'd all been swallowed—and then I knew I had to come out to you."

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Quietly Mallory began to tell them about the surface world. He told them how the day and night came and went with miraculous regularity and how the stars floated in a sea of space that stretched into distances that were lost in some infinite vastness without beginning or end.

He spoke of the moon which was so close and of its reflected light, and of the sun that would be shining life on the Earth all through the long day that waited beyond the darkness. And he described the great floating galaxies beyond their sight, the star clusters, the white dwarf suns and the giant yellow ones.

They stood there for a long time in the coolness listening to him as he talked about the even greater wonders he had discovered from the books in the sunken vault of stone—about the seasons of the Earth and how the blades of grass grew by absorbing nourishment from the soil and the trees, and the crops which man had once cultivated upon the Earth.

They heard about the mammals and insects, the birds, the swarming life in the oceans. They listened in awe as he told them about the rolling surging waters over the face of the Earth, and the mountain ranges thrusting up into the sky, and the layer of air that was the Earth's atmosphere.

And as they listened, there came to them a more complete understanding of the death they had thought of as life within the press of the walls. But now the joy they were experiencing deepened their need for life ever more abundant, and they desired only to walk upon the Earth, and be a part of the birth-and-growth cycle that after all the years was rising and spreading there again.

Mallory stopped talking.

They listened to the buzzing and humming of insects and to a breeze that had begun to flow among the trees. They listened to the rustle and the sighing; and, from behind the hills there came to them, on the eddying currents of wind, the crash of the ocean surf breaking against beach and rocks. They smelled the fresh, clean smell of dew-washed leaves and grass, moist Earth and night-blooming flowers.

And then suddenly Mary said, "Let's never go back in the house again."

Helen started, and looked at her daughter, a growing wonder in her eyes.

"What *are* we going to do, John?" she asked.

"We could go out on the Earth," said Mallory.

With awe in his voice, Bob said, "There'd be trees to climb and the ground to dig in. I could climb the hills and maybe we could build a boat and sail on the ocean—like the men in some of those pictures you showed us on the visemo. Could we do all that, Dad?"

"Yes," said Mallory. "All that and more."

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"I could take off all my clothes," exclaimed Mary. "I could wade in the ocean and swim, like we saw people doing in the pictures. I could walk and walk in the grass and I could watch the stars every night and the birds every day."

Then Helen said, "We could have a house with windows in it—*real* windows. We saw people looking out of windows in the visemo. And this glorious fresh air would come right into my house."

"Yes," said Mallory. "But—there's something else."

He stared at the dark ground. "There are other people back in the city. I could keep on working at the visemo center and I could wire it into another circuit, just as I wired ours. I could show other families what life on the surface is like. Perhaps I could even take another family out on some night like this."

"It's hard to understand you, John," said Helen quietly.

"They are trapped now, victims of their own fear, their own lack of knowledge. But if I could open their eyes and show them what it means to be free under the stars—"

They all stared at him, waiting.

"We've got a responsibility. The people in the cities are under sentence of death. The visemo will eventually rob them of the will to live. There will be mass suicides—unless I have the courage and strength of purpose to do something about it."

"I don't want to go back," said Mary, raising her face again to the sky.

Helen turned away from him. "We hardly know any of the other people in the city. Why should you sacrifice your own happiness to help them?"

"We could have a swell time out here," said Bob. "We don't *need* anybody else."

"There's something I'd like to show you on the visemo," said Mallory. "You've never seen it. But I think you ought to."

His eyes were on the stars.

"But the Mayor and the psychologist will be coming soon," said Helen, alarm in her voice. "If they catch us—"

"I think we should risk it. I think we've got to."

Helen looked up at the sky again and around at the dark trees gently swaying in the night breeze. Then without a word she took Mary by the hand and moved back toward the lighted opening.

IV

MALLORY closed the door of the great, stone vault and returned through the night to his cupola, which glowed dully in the downstreaming moonlight. He carried a thin circular can under his arm. Crawling through the oval opening, he replaced the removed slab of wall, and sealed it into position with the disk of steel that had cut it open. Then he went to the wall

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at the edge of the now dark visemo eye.

Helen and Mary and Bob sat watching him as he opened a door and stepped behind a screen. After a minute, he came out and sat down beside them.

"This is one of the old pictures," he said. "It was taken a long time ago, before the underground cities were built." Reaching out, he turned a knob on the visemo's tuning dial.

As the lights dimmed, brightness flooded the screen and the picture swam into focus. A long needle-nosed torpedo propelled by flame hung tilted upwards against a blue-black sky swimming with white starpoints. The nose of the torpedo tilted downward and far below could be seen the lighted skyline of a great city. The lights began slowly to go out in sections until the city was a mountain of darkness.

A spurt of flame burst open the piled-up darkness and white-hot lightning flared. A blinding mountain of fire sprang up and billowed out in a great orange flower that spouted a smoke column a thousand feet high. Then the orange fire faded and the column stood like a giant tree, burned black.

Now the picture changed on the screen to a rubble-piled city. An ocean of smoke hung above it fed by a thousand rising streams of dark vapor. And there were people crawling in the rubble, digging deeply for the injured and dying and carrying them from the piled ashes and the hills of molten stone and steel. Carrying them out onto the scorched Earth and bandaging them and speaking words of comfort to them when comfort was of scant avail.

There were cries of agony and in the foreground a woman was sobbing softly. Long rivers of people, carrying the stricken survivors, were flowing sluggishly toward the horizon.

But there were many who would not leave the radiation-saturated rubble of the city for the temporary safety of the horizon and chose instead to stay with the injured, quieting them with sedatives, and tending their wounds. And those who stayed were dying also, with the tragic victims of the disaster, even as they struggled to save them.

The picture came into close focus. A man wrapping a bandage suddenly stopped and turned his face to the sky. His hands shook and then his whole body. He fell backwards and lay still. After a moment, amidst the piled and broken stone, a woman stepped to his side and listened with her ear pressed to his chest for a long moment.

Then she turned to another man lying half bandaged against a shattered stone wall. She finished re-winding the bandage and read a note pinned on a blackened shirt front. With calm purposefulness she took a hypodermic needle from

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a bag slung over her shoulder, and administered a sedative injection. Nodding reassuringly, she sat close beside the man and talked to him quietly until his rigid face relaxed.

Mallory reached toward the tuning dial again and the picture faded into the visemo's great staring eye. He did not speak but sat watching his wife and the two children.

Suddenly Mary burst into tears and ran to her mother, sobbing against her neck. With tender solicitude Helen comforted her.

Bob looked at his father and said, "That was—awful."

Mallory nodded. "It was what drove the cities underground. It was the beginning of the kind of life we're living now. And you saw that there were men and women who stayed to help and risked death rather than run away."

He pressed his son's hand. "Are we going to run away from our city, or are we going to stay and help? There's death here too. The death of minds, the slow destruction of the human heritage of beauty and wisdom and love. Man has created it, just as he created the torpedo that dropped on the city. And there's something we can do about it . . .

Suddenly the spot of light above the door glowed red.

They all stared at it, as though it were an accusing eye watching them.

Mallory leaned forward. "The Mayor and the psychologist are coming down the corridor," he said. "Now listen to me. You've got to do exactly as I say or we'll never see the sky again."

They sat very still.

"I'll turn on the visemo," Mallory said. "Watch it, and let me talk to them. Act as if you're so intent on the visemo that you can't even turn away for a second. The emotion and thought beams will be turned on too. Let yourself *feel* them as you've always done. And remember, they've got to go away satisfied that the increased power has made us incapable of rebellion, and completely normal from their distorted point of view."

Mallory manipulated the tuning dial again, and a picture flashed on the screen of a cake being taken out of an oven by a white-coated, white-capped baker. The voice came, insistent, beguiling; "You'll like this creamy soft cake. Notice the smooth, white frosting and the mound of tempting whipped cream. Taste the sweetness—"

Suddenly the door opened silently, and two men stepped across the threshold and stood there, observing Mallory and his family.

The visemo voice flowed on, hypnotically. The image of the cake floated across the room, turning slowly. Lights shimmered over its surface, and an hour before, to Helen and the children, it would have been a vision of ecstasy spreading across the tongue and deep into the taste buds.

The psychologist stepped for-

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ward and looked into the face of each of the seated visemo viewers.

"They don't even follow me with their eyes," he said to the Mayor. "They're far too intent on the screen. Absolutely nothing else exists for them at the moment. I think we can be completely sure that their reactions are now normal."

"You've no doubt at all?" asked the Mayor.

"None whatever. The increase in power has brought them safely back."

The Mayor stepped to the psychologist's side and peered into the four faces. "We still don't know what caused them to depart from the norm in the first place," he said.

The psychologist frowned. "Well, no. The human mind is a strange instrument. Sometimes it goes off kilter without apparent reason. If it ever happens again—which I don't think it will as we're a very well-adjusted society—we've got the remedy. It worked with these people, so we can be quite sure it will work with others. Just turn up the power of the visemo until the psychological distortion disappears."

"It's a great discovery you've made, Doctor," said the Mayor. "I'll see that you get recognition."

"Thank you," said the psychologist. "The satisfaction is reward enough, believe me."

Mallory stirred. The Mayor looked at him quickly. "Mr. Mallory," he said. "You'll take over the visemo center in the morning, as usual."

Softly, Mallory said, "Of course, Mr. Mayor. Of course."

"Everything's all right, Mr. Mallory," said the psychologist reassuringly. "Just go on as you are. And if there's ever any change let me know. You, too, Mrs. Mallory—as you did today. Your complete frankness was very commendable. We're equipped to handle any changes which may occur and remedy them just as we did tonight. You understand that, I'm sure."

Mrs. Mallory smiled faintly and nodded.

"Just remember," went on the psychologist, "nothing can happen to change you that we can't wipe away as if it had never happened . . . And so we'll say goodnight."

The door silently opened again, and then closed.

Mallory touched the tuning dial. The picture died and the thought and emotion beams faded and it was as though a fresh wind had blown through the room.

His hand returned to the dial and Beethoven's Sixth Symphony surged around them. For a long time they listened to the beauty and the power of the music, enraptured by the joyfulness and the deep sorrow of it and the endless life of it.

Mallory opened the wall again and let the moonlight and the freshness into the room.

They all went out onto the Earth and stood there, feeling the soft

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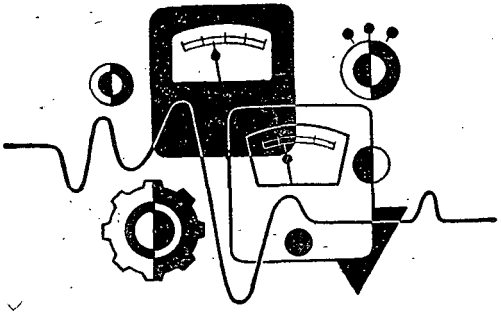
ground beneath their feet, smelling the night air, looking up into the sky and all around at the dark gently swaying trees and bushes and grass that, unknown to man, had silently come back to life through the long years.

And as they stood there, the music from the room flowed out and around them and mingled with the air and the green things in a great resistless surge of deathless beauty.

Mallory, deeply aware of all this, was thinking of how he would begin on the morrow to change another circuit to some other family so that they, too, might know a new birth of freedom under the stars.



DON'T MISS THESE UNUSUAL STORIES FEATURED NEXT MONTH—DRAMATIC HEADLINERS ALL

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the first sweet sleep of night

by . . . Robert F. Young

The strange, bewildering fragrance from the Flower Islands was as mysterious as life itself. And with it came desire — and death.

WHEN SHE WAS seventeen Millicent Clarke had picked up the thin volume of her young life entitled, "Men," closed it firmly, and placed it on the mental shelf labeled "Books I'll Never Read Again."

At the time it had seemed a logical classification, but several years later when she was majoring in anthropology she found that she had to take the book down again now and then for purposes of reference. As a feeling of frustration usually accompanied the act, it was not surprising that she came eventually to specialize in matrilineal societies. The more markedly matrilineal they were, the better she liked them.

The present society was positively fascinating. Not only was it markedly matrilineal, but it subsisted on an Elysian land mass the equal of which Millicent had never seen in any of her previous planetary field work.

Topographically, the land mass was a paradox. In one sense it was an imposing continent, and in another it was nothing more than an emaciated island. It was more than

So lyrical in mood and so rich in poetic imagery is this astounding fictional excursion into the still largely unexplored realm of comparative ethnology that the profundity of its underlying premise may at first escape you. But we urge that you ponder that premise long and earnestly, for in a kind of glorified nutshell Robert Young has encapsulated the entire tragedy of human life on this planet, and shown us exactly what guilt feelings in juxtaposition with a cultural complex can do to human nature throughout Time and Space.

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a thousand miles in length, and it rose out of the Sapphire Sea on a line with the Fomalhaut 4 equator; but for all its length, its width never exceeded five miles.

The north coast was scalloped with white beaches. Hills began modestly as sand dunes, acquired trees and grass farther inland, rose ever and ever higher and finally dropped, in abrupt cliffs, to the line of jagged rocks that comprised the south coast. The wind crashed the sea against the rocks from morning to night. It had never slackened nor changed direction during the two Terran months since the subsidiary camp had been established, and Millicent had begun to doubt if it ever would.

However, Millicent liked the windless days of the leeward side. The temperature was consistently comfortable, so there wasn't really any need for a wind, though occasionally a fragment of moving air did surmount the barrier of the cliffs and come tiptoeing over the grassy hills to the encampment. One came up behind her now and caressed her short brown hair.

But she hardly noticed. She was too engrossed with her journal . . .

I am beginning to think (she wrote) *that we have stumbled upon a pure matrilineal society, although Dr. Vestor does not agree with me, and Dr. Hanley made the comment, in his usual sarcastic manner, that I have arrived at a typically subjective conclusion, referring no doubt to my absorption with my chosen specialty.*

Nevertheless, postulating a pure susu throws at least some light upon our present impasse. If the present susu is undiluted, as I think, it is unprecedented in our experience and our inability to comprehend it stems largely from our tendency to use previous diluted susus for criteria—

"Iced tea, Dr. Clarke?"

Startled, Millicent looked up. "Oh—Oh, thank you, Dr. Hanley. I was just catching up on my notes." She accepted the tall frosted glass and set it on the arm of the tent chair.

"Gloria made it," Dr. Hanley said. "She and Vestor and I are going to play a few games of Martian canasta in the mess tent. Care to join us?"

"Oh, no," Millicent said: "I really have to finish this entry."

He looked at her quizzically, his gray eyes laughing and yet not laughing at all. It was an unanalytical mannerism that had made her dislike him all through college and all during their field work together. He must have sensed her annoyance.

"Okay, I only asked," he said. "By the way, you know it's Saturday afternoon, don't you?"

He turned and walked away.

Primarily such a postulation gives us our first clear insight into the predominant paradox of the pres-

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ent culture—the outstanding dearth of males. While it fails to resolve the problem of what physical cause lies behind this dearth, it eliminates the paradoxical element of the result, for what could be more logical than that the females of a pure susu should overwhelmingly outnumber the males of a pure susu?

Such a postulation does not, unfortunately, explain the cyclic age groups of both females and males, but it does provide us with a sound foundation upon which to erect the structure of our culture study . . .

Saturday afternoon—

It was so silly to compute non-Terran time by the Terran calendar, Millicent thought. Particularly when you were on a planet whose orbital velocity was so insignificant that its year equalled almost twenty of Terra's. She laid her notebook on her lap and picked up the glass of iced tea.

Saturday afternoon—

At her feet the hill on which the subsidiary camp stood dropped gently down to the shore of the blue cove. The native village sprawled lazily on the white sand, and native fishing boats speckled the placid water like basking water spiders. Beyond the cove, the Sapphire Sea spread out in sparkling wastes to the low-lying Flower Islands.

She sipped the iced tea slowly, letting its flavor linger in her mouth. Her mind skipped back a dozen years to the patio of her father's summer home, and she saw her father sitting by the rose trellis with his eternal volume of Shelley, and she saw herself, a little girl sitting in a sequestered corner with her books . . .

The memory should have been pleasant, but it was rather horrible instead. Millicent set the glass on the ground and stood up. She decided to let her notes go till evening; somehow she didn't feel like writing any more.

Laughter and the tinkle of ice cubes came from the nearby mess tent. For a moment she considered joining the three players, then she thought of Gloria Mitchell. Gloria Mitchell was the group's secretary; she was blonde and chic and read confession comics. She was just about the last person in the world you would have expected staid anthropologists like Dr. Vestor and Dr. Hanley to choose for a secretary.

Suddenly Millicent hated the camp. She felt as though she couldn't endure it for another second. After returning her journal to her tent, she started walking back into the hills.

She climbed her favorite hill and sat down beneath her favorite tree and gazed out over the Sapphire Sea to the Flower Islands. The pounding of the waves against the jagged feet of the cliffs came softly to her ears.

She forced her wandering thoughts into anthropological channels, concentrating on the na-

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tive village on the shore of the cove. There were hundreds of similar villages, all of them matriarchies, scattered along the northern littoral, but one was enough for her purposes.

She thought of the incredibly beautiful people she had seen, and wondered for the thousandth time why they avoided sex. Especially the men. As far as Millicent had been able to ascertain they actually shunned the nubile women, fishing alone by day, and staying close to the susus of their own families by night. It was as though sex did not exist.

And yet, obviously enough, it did exist.

The sound of the waves against the cliffs was soporific. Millicent stifled a small yawn. With an effort, she concentrated on the village again.

The apparent absence of sex was only a minor problem, but it was directly related to the major problem of the age groups. The fact that none of the natives was under twenty Terran years of age was puzzling enough. But it was only a mild incongruity compared to the additional fact that none of the men was over twenty years of age, and that the women ranged from twenty to forty to sixty years of age, with no intermediate age groups.

That certainly indicated a twenty year sexual cycle. Or a one year sexual cycle, computing it in Fomalhaut 4 time. Which was the way it should be computed, Millicent reminded herself sleepily. But no matter how you computed it, two irreconcilable questions remained—what had caused the cycle in the first place, and what happened to the men when they passed the cyclic age of one, or twenty?

She yawned again. The hilltop was so tranquil, the pounding of the waves so remote, so unreal; soft, and growing ever softer...

She must have dozed off for, suddenly, Dr. Hanley was standing there, tall and willowy against a sky that had faded from deep blue to wan gray. She sat up abruptly, rubbing her eyes.

"Why," she said, "I must have dropped off!"

"We looked all over for you back at camp. Gloria got a bad attack of stomach cramps and when Vestor radioed main base the M.D. said to bring her in in the launch. He thought it might be appendicitis."

"Oh, I'm sorry," Millicent said. "I should have been there."

"Vestor wanted you to go along. He didn't want to leave the two of us here alone, and yet he couldn't take me along because that would have left you completely alone. But he's coming right back."

Millicent stood up. There was a strange stillness in the air. "I'm afraid I don't quite follow your line of reasoning, Dr. Hanley."

The mirthless laughter was in his eyes again, mocking her. "It's

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very simple, Dr. Clarke," he said. "Vestor was merely concerned over your reputation. There is a quality about foursomes that renders them inviolate to the workings of malicious minds. When, however, the foursome is reduced to a twosome, the quality disappears.

"Our esteemed co-workers are probably bored to death with the lugubrious nordic culture they are dissecting and will be delighted to hear that a male and a female anthropologist have been left all-alone on a tropical island with nothing but the light of stars to chaperon them. It will give them something to talk about besides traits and ancestral backgrounds, and climatic cycles as they affect mass pattern deviations."

Millicent felt the abrupt hotness of her face. "I assure you, Dr. Hanley," she said between tight lips, "that there'll be no substantiation for whatever contemptible little lies they invent concerning us!"

"I'm sure there won't be." The laughter was gone from his eyes. "We'd better be getting back to camp, don't you think? I'm sure you must have some new data to enter into your journal."

"I certainly have!"

She followed him down the hill. The stillness seemed to increase with each passing moment. There was something wrong about it, a subtle wrongness that Millicent couldn't put her finger on till they reached the hill where the camp stood. And then, abruptly, she realized what it was.

The pounding of the waves against the cliffs had ceased.

Suddenly she felt the first warm breath of moving air and knew that the wind had changed.

It was coming from the north . . .

They ate in silence, facing each other across the narrow table in the mess tent. The only sounds were the sporadic whirring of the generator below the crest of the hill, and the rushing sound of the wind.

Dr. Hanley finished his coffee and stood up. "I don't want to keep you away from your notes," he said. "Don't split any infinitives now." He walked out into the wind, his shoulders held straight.

She sat there furious for some time. Then she started back to her tent. The wind was a sweet river of air flowing in over the sea. It rushed round her warm and cool, tugging at her bobbed hair, trying vainly to send it swirling about her face and neck. She paused before the mess tent, breathing deeply. There was another scent blended with the salt-scent of the sea—the musky perfume of the Flower Islands. Millicent had breathed it only once before, but she had never forgotten it.

It seemed to pervade her entire body, and for a moment she felt vertiginous. The wind flattened her slacks against her thighs, flapped her jacket wildly. Below, on the shore of the cove, she could see the

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lights of the village, and she heard the new sound of surf on sand.

She walked slowly toward her tent. Dr. Hanley's tent was in darkness and he was nowhere to be seen. She guessed that he was probably visiting the village again, for in his own way he was as concerned with the culture problem as she was.

She switched on her tent light and tied the flaps. Undaunted, the wind slipped beneath the canvas walls and filled the interior with its heady scent. She got her journal out of the locker, sat down at the table, and riffled through the pages. An entry caught her eye:

In typical matrilineal societies, once the male is forced into marriage he is under the dual obligation of both his bride's susu and his mother's susu. He must provide for both households but he is not permitted to live in either, that of his mother having cast him out because he deserted it for another, and that of his bride having cast him out because the bride's mother is so fiercely possessive that she cannot endure giving him even enough floor space upon which to sleep. There are incidents, in societies of this sort, of males committing suicide because of their rejection by their communities . . .

Was it possible, Millicent wondered, for the males of a *pure* susu to be driven to commit *mass* suicide? She shook her head. No, it wasn't likely. Not without some other influencing factor—some circumstance of environment, of climate or topography.

The rushing sound of the wind was mesmerizing. She sat there listening to it, the entry blurring before her eyes. Presently she heard the distant murmur of voices, of voices raised in lilting song. She untied the flap and peered out. The hills were awash with pale starlight. The native village seemed to be spreading; flickering lights were everywhere, expanding in a widening semi-circle into the hills.

The flap slipped from her fingers and whipped wildly beside her. The fragrance of the Flower Islands was all around her. She swayed. Everything was unreal, and yet real in a way that transcended reality, that made ordinary reality a mockery, a progression of cold, loveless days.

I mustn't let myself go, she whispered to the wind. I mustn't!

The desperate fingers of her mind seized upon her notes and she ran back to the table, riffled her journal to the last entry, and began to write. She wrote without thinking, and the lines emerged from her subconscious, materializing on the page.

I arise from dreams of Thee
In the first sweet sleep of night,
When the winds are breathing low
And the stars are shining bright

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She stared at the words in horror, fighting back the hated memory that had gained a foothold in her mind. Abruptly she got up and ran out into the night.

All around her in the hills women were carrying flaming torches. Their faces were exotic in the reddish radiance, their lips moved in soft beckoning song. The wind sent their dark hair drifting about their naked shoulders, made swirling mist out of their garments. Some of them wandered through the camp, but though they looked right at her they did not see her.

Presently Millicent saw the men. They walked as though dreaming, tall and lithe, their bodies flowing in the unreasonable night. At first she could not believe their faces, for their faces were beautiful.

And then she saw Dr. Hanley, and his face was beautiful, too. Beautiful—and frightening.

She shrank back into the shadow of the tent and watched him pass. He walked the way the natives walked, as though he did not know he walked at all. The first soft mist of spring had touched the grayness of his eyes. He passed her very close, but he did not see her, and then he descended the southern slope of the hill. The wind fluttered the collar of his khaki jacket and ruffled his light brown hair.

The wind. The scented north wind—

Suddenly Millicent understood the behavior pattern of the culture. In one lucid second the whole array of paradoxes dissolved into a crystal clear sequence of cause and effect . . .

During the last lap of the southward flight, the launch had passed over the Flower Islands and everyone had been fascinated by the polychromatic patterns that floated like riotous nosegays on the face of the Sapphire Sea. No one had given a thought to the musky fragrance that drifted subtly through the open vents.

The phrase "Flower Islands" leaped to everyone's lips at once, and later the place-name was entered on Dr. Hanley's Fomalhaut 4 map. In addition to the unanimous voicing of the place name, several other incidents occurred in quick succession.

Dr. Vestor put his arm around Gloria Mitchell's shoulders, and leaned over and kissed her on the mouth. Instead of resisting, Gloria Mitchell responded passionately.

Dr. Hanley said: "I didn't laugh, Milli. I wasn't one of the ones who laughed."

Millicent answered: "I know. But all the others laughed and that's what destroyed it."

"But *I* didn't laugh, Milli. I tried to tell you so many times, but you'd never listen. You'd always withdraw into yourself and I'd find myself talking to a shell of a woman. That's why I stopped trying—"

"The others laughed and that was the end of it. Can't you un-

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derstand that? Can't you see why it had to be the end?"

"No, I'll never understand . . ."

His voice trailed away and the softness that had come into his eyes disappeared. Abruptly Millicent blushed and wondered why she hadn't blushed before. She noticed then that Dr. Vestor's arm was no longer around Gloria Mitchell's shoulders, that he was sitting stiffly in the pilot's seat, his neck the color of a tropical sunset. The Flower Islands were far behind, and the automatic controls were guiding the launch toward the elongated land mass that showed in the distance.

They had landed a short time later and had gone about establishing the subsidiary camp as though nothing unusual had occurred. The incident had never been mentioned, as though by tacit agreement, and Millicent had carefully kept it from trespassing upon her thoughts. Until now—

The Flower Islands were uninhabited. For the first time she realized why they were uninhabited.

No race of people could possibly adapt itself to such a milieu.

But a race of people could adapt itself to the land mass to the south —if the prevailing wind was from the south. If it were a normal race, its sexual cycle would be influenced, though not necessarily determined, by the number of times the wind shifted to the north.

An extremely matriarchal race, however, would react somewhat differently—as in the present instance. When the wind was from the south, sex was avoided by the men because marriage was synonymous with social death. But when the wind shifted to the north, the aphrodisiacal fragrance which it carried southward from the Flower Islands was enough to overcome their fear of social death and send them off in pursuit of the nubile women who, already affected, had wandered into the hills, crooning tribal love songs to lure prospective suitors.

From the evidence of the age groups, it was clear that the wind changed direction for a brief period once every Fomalhaut 4 year. But the limited longevity of the men indicated that another factor was involved. That factor had to be topography.

Fear of social death, Millicent realized, was not enough in itself to cause a man to kill himself. But abetted by the right symbolical interpretation of his milieu, it could be more than enough. All primitive races were in some measure influenced by the topography of their native habitat.

In some cases they were inordinately influenced. From the perspective of an observer the present land mass was merely unusual. But from the perspective of the natives who lived and died on it, in whose eyes it constituted the entire universe, it equalled life and death and was symbolically interpreted according to those terms.

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The beaches and the coves of the north coast represented life, since all sustenance for life came from the sea and from the sands bordering the sea. The hills, possibly because of their superficial resemblance to virginal breasts, were the fertility symbol, the place where all life was reproduced. And the cliffs—

The cliffs symbolized death.

The topographical interpretation of existence, therefore, was life, reproduction, and death, death for the men immediately following the reproductive act because of the association of the hills with the cliffs, and the parallel association of the idea of marriage with the idea of social death.

Taken separately, neither association would have been strong enough to evoke the suicide response. But taken together, they made the death-wish inevitable . . .

The last of the natives had passed. Dr. Hanley was a barely discernible figure moving up the starlit slope of the next hill.

"Dr. Hanley," Millicent shouted. "Dr. Hanley!"

He did not pause. He surmounted the star-kissed crest of the hill and started down the opposite slope. Torches danced like boated fireflies in the distance.

She started to run after him. Then she paused.

She looked down at her baggy jacket, at her uncompromising mannish slacks. She reached up and touched her short hair. She remembered the gossamer garments of the native women and the way their long hair had drifted in the wind. She remembered their beautiful faces.

She touched her own face, her cheeks, her mouth. She pressed her fingers against her lips, trying to soften their hard line, but the hardness would not go away.

She couldn't change the expression of her face or the shortness of her hair. Nothing but time could do that. But there was something that she could do. She walked on numb feet to her tent and she opened her foot locker with numb hands. The dress was at the bottom where she had placed it—how long ago?

Before that it had been at the bottom of a bureau drawer in a dormitory, and before that it had been at the bottom of another bureau drawer in another dormitory, and before that it had been at the bottom of a bureau drawer in her room where she had placed it on her seventeenth birthday.

When she uncovered it the first thing she saw was the crumpled corsage of plastic violets, and that was when she began to cry.

IT WAS her seventeenth birthday and she was descending the staircase to the improvised ballroom. The polished floor was already aswirl with youthful dancers and the little orchestra in the corner was bravely playing "Roses from the South."

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It was her seventeenth birthday and she had been reading "Lines to an Indian Air" in her room, glancing shyly, now and then, at her oval face in the mirror, listening to the pounding of her heart; touching the gossamer shoulder straps of her new white dress to reassure herself that they were real, that she was real, that the lovely night in June was real, and that she was really seventeen.

It was her seventeenth birthday and it was her first dress, and it was the first time that she had ever dared to leave the enchanted universe of her books and come out and inform the world that she, too, beneath her shapeless sweaters and her schoolgirl skirts, had been a woman all the time, and a beautiful woman too.

Bruce was standing at the base of the stairs when she came down, his eyes absorbing her springtime loveliness—her soft child's face, the whiteness of her shoulders, the burgeoning swell of her breasts. The plastic violets above her heart had bloomed a springtime blue.

He stepped forward, without a word, and took her in his arms, and together they floated away on the surf of the music. In the sweet sea of sound her shyness had left her, and she had almost become a woman.

And then she had felt the abrupt coldness of her breasts, heard the first intimations of the laughter. She had looked down then, and seen the broken strap, and her nakedness, and felt the first searing blush of her shame. She had run across the gleaming floor, through the dancers and the mounting laughter, to the stairs, and wildly up the stairs to the cool virginal sanctuary of her room—

MILLICENT was still crying when she slipped out of her clothes. She was crying when she mended the strap, crying when she slipped into the dress and felt its soft coolness against her flesh. She was crying when she left the tent and ran into the hills.

The returning launch passed like a great dark bird above her, but she did not see it. Her shoes were ugly mannish things and she kicked them off and felt the soft moist grass beneath her bare feet. She ran on, feeling the dress against her body and the wind upon her, inhaling the fragrance that the wind carried, running swiftly beneath the sharp bright stars. And something deep within her broke and her tears stopped and the cool wind dried her eyes.

Behind her someone was shouting her name, but she paid no attention. Her eyes were absorbed with star-washed valleys and pale slopes, eager for a glimpse of the familiar willowy figure of the man she loved.

She overtook him finally. He was breasting a high hill and she was in the valley just below. "Bruce," she cried. "Bruce!"

He heard her this time, and

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turned. When he saw her standing in the starlight he ran stumbling down the hill. She collapsed in his arms. "I ran away," she said. "I ran away and I never stopped running. I'm so sorry, darling."

There was the sound of pounding footsteps. Dr. Vestor was wearing an oxygen mask and he was tremendously excited. He raised the mask briefly when he came up to them.

"No time for questions now," he gasped. "Just put these on and follow me. We're going back to Main Base!"

They donned the masks he handed them. Then, hand in hand, they followed him back over the dwindling hills to the launch.

Anthropologists, as a rule, do not interfere with the pattern of a culture. But there are exceptions to every rule, and—I think all of us were relieved to see the demolition crew board the launch this morning and head southward for the Flower Islands.

I have just returned from sick bay and am happy to record that Miss Mitchell's appendectomy was a success. On his last visit to her, Dr. Vestor optimistically left her a copy of Pyczykiewicz's excellent Atypical Pantheistic Patterns of Certain Camelopardalis Cultures *and she had the volume propped before her when I came in, reading it with every indication of absorption. When she closed it, however, I detected the telltale yellow edge of a confession comic protruding from the pages and I am beginning to suspect that her affection for Dr. Vestor, genuine though it may be, will never quite extend itself to include Dr. Vestor's métier.*

He proposed to her, she told me, while they were passing over the Flower Islands on their way back to Main Base, and it was that particular incident, I think, although the proposal itself was unquestionably a true manifestation of his suppressed desire, that activated the concatenation of ratiocination that led ultimately to his analysis of the culture, and, of course, to his immediate return to the southern land mass for Dr. Hanley and myself.

The wedding, incidentally, will be a double one, and is scheduled to take place as soon as the demolition crew returns. Bruce calls it the "Flower Island Wedding" and says that I am his "Flower Island Bride." He's always saying quaint things like that.

Shortly, we shall be leaving Fomalhaut 4 for Terra. I shall be relieved in a way. I realize that such an emotion is atypical of me, but the nordic culture here has begun to pall on me. It too has turned out to be matrilineal.

For some reason, I am rather sick of matrilineal cultures . . .

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final exam

by . . . Sam Merwin Jr.

They had prepared a sturdy bomb shelter to protect the Great Man from the Flying Saucers. But he had to see them with his own eyes.

THEY TRIED to make the Great Man go down into the lead-and-graphite-sheathed bomb shelter deep under the outwardly modest Mid-western house that was his "secret" summer residence. His aides, his secretary, the civilian-clothed body-guards—all of them were insistent.

"You're much too valuable, sir" . . .

"It's our sworn duty to protect you, sir" . . .

"We don't know what *they* are, sir . . ."

The Great Man knew he was breaking the hearts of his official family by disobeying. But curiosity was one of the traits that had helped him to the top, and he had heard too much about "them"—although he had yet to see one of the alien visitors. He looked at his wife, and read in her serene gaze that she understood and approved. He said, to his chief aide: "If they've found us here, there's not much sense in hiding, is there?"

And, when no definite reply was forthcoming, he asked, "What is your theory as to their nature—and just how many of them are there?"

"Denver reports half a dozen

Sam Merwin's entertaining, provocative, and warmly human little yarns about spacemen and their foibles have enlivened our pages—along with novelette-length stories of wider compass and somewhat graver import—since that momentous hour when FANTASTIC UNIVERSE *was born out of the fire-mists of an island universe hovering directly opposite the Pleiades. But seldom has he come up with a shorter-length yarn quite as excitingly unusual as this.*

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headed directly this way at an estimated two thousand miles per hour," said the Air Force aide, his handsome face a rigid mask of disapproval. "That was five minutes ago."

"And their nature?" the Great Man repeated quietly.

It was the Air Defense aide who answered him. "We don't know, sir. They look simply like rather large, moving lights in the sky. But, as always, radar has picked up solid bodies."

"Thank you." The Great Man glanced at the banjo clock on the flower-papered wall. "They should be here any minute then," he said. "Gentlemen, I ask you to leave us alone. I have no wish to command you."

Obviously, this unorthodox request put an alarming spoke in the closely-meshed wheels of the armed defense plans. Sensing the uncertainty and dismay of everyone in the room, the Great Man said, "I wish you to observe, and report—but on no account are you to inaugurate hostile action. Is that clear?"

"But what if they attack first?" The Air Force aide inquired anxiously.

"I said you were not to *inaugurate* hostile action," was the Great Man's quiet reply. "If they actually attack—and I doubt that they will from the past records—you are free to take whatever defensive measures you may consider necessary."

They left the room reluctantly, unhappily. The Great Man smiled at his wife. "Darling," he said, "let's go to the balcony. If those well-meaning friends of ours think they're going to stop me from seeing my first flying saucers they're tragically mistaken."

"Of course, dear," his wife replied.

She already had her knitting neatly stowed away in the needlepoint bag in which she customarily carried it. Now she removed her glasses and put them in their case, and rose quickly to her feet, still a trim, attractive figure of a woman despite her fifty years.

As they walked toward the balcony, the Great Man wondered what he could have accomplished without her. Certainly, the nine years since their marriage had been his happiest—each a glowing milestone in his swift climb to political eminence.

They stood side by side on the broad balcony, which was really the verandah roof, and looked out at the star-swept skies. Roughly gauging the direction with his eyes, the Great Man said, "If the reports are accurate, they should be coming from *there*." He pointed toward the low flat sweep of the southwestern horizon.

"Darling! Look over there!"

There was controlled excitement in his wife's soft voice.

He followed her gaze a bit further north, and immediately saw them—one, two, three, and then three more—as they came sweeping earthward at an incredible speed.

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They looked like immense balls of light, slightly fuzzy around the edges, leaving faint trails of white fire in their wake.

They were terrifyingly near — and they moved into silence. The Great Man knew that all around the house, in a complex involving many square miles, alert defenders were stationed—some at radar panels and others around electronic anti-aircraft cannon and Nike launchers, their weapons primed with atomic warheads. Yet the night was silent.

A cricket chirped somewhere, but its song was quickly drowned in the faint unmistakable whine of a distant jet engine. The Air Force was on sky reconnaissance. The Great Man uttered a silent prayer that they would confine themselves to observation. There was another whine, and then another and another, each growing louder against the stars as the mysterious invaders swept rapidly closer.

Although flying saucer stories had appeared in the press in waves, with long intervals between reports, in official circles that activity had not died down since their first sighting by Kenneth Arnold in 1947. Of late, more and more such activity had been reported. They had been seen over the big cities, as well as above more isolated regions. Unmistakably, it was a pattern of approaching climax.

Over Europe, Africa, South America and behind the Iron Curtain as well as over North America, the Unidentified Flying Objects had been observed and had given birth to the wildest speculations.

A disturbed Moscow had labeled them horror weapons of the imperialistic powers. And certain American journals had insisted they were super-Soviet aircraft that foreshadowed another and greater Pearl Harbor.

But until now the Great Man had never seen one of them—had even disbelieved in their existence. He watched them swoop closer, ever closer, and his left arm sought the reassuring solace of his wife's waist.

"What are they?" he wondered aloud. "Where do they come from? What do they *want*?"

Suddenly the leading invader dropped with incredible swiftness, until it seemed to be hovering directly above them. A quartet of searchlight beams stabbed out and, for an instant, held it in a cross-flare of light.

The Great Man gasped. It was solid, and its billowing contours hinted at a complex simplicity that was, the Great Man sensed instinctively, beyond the inventive capacity of human technology at its most ingenious.

Then, as suddenly as it had appeared, it was gone—and with it went the other lights. The Great Man realized he was gripping his wife far too tightly, and released her. He laughed, a bit shakily, and said, "Well, anyway, I've seen one of them close up."

"What do you think it was?" his

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wife asked quietly as they went back indoors.

He shook his head. "I'm damned if I know," he told her. "Darling, I think I'd better talk to Harlan. He may have an idea. Do you mind?"

"Of course not," she replied warmly. "Give him my love. And let me know what he thinks they are."

Harlan was not an official. A philosopher, a teacher, a writer, a brilliant theoretical astrophysicist, he was the Great Man's closest friend and most trusted advisor. Independently wealthy, he had stubbornly refused to take any salaried post. "This way," he had told the Great Man more than once, "I'm still my own master and can offer occasional suggestions that you won't have to frown upon officially."

He had taken a house less than a mile from the Great Man's inland residence. He did not seem to care at all that it was a comfortable, hideously ugly relic of the "big house" period that extended roughly from 1880 to 1910. It took the Great Man less than five minutes to reach it.

As always on seeing him again after a month's absence the Great Man was startled by his advisor's outward youthfulness. Save for the grey that peppered his close-cropped hair, and the tiny crow's-feet about his eyes, Harlan might have been a remarkably precocious, quite recent university graduate.

More shaken than he cared to admit, the Great Man asked, "Did you see it, Harlan?"

"I saw," said Harlan softly. Like the Great Man's wife, the famed astrophysicist seemed built around an inner serenity that enabled him to meet each of life's crises, firmly, rationally, and without foolish or fearful deviation.

"What do you think?" the Great Man asked him.

For a moment Harlan regarded his guest calmly from around the bowl of his pipe. Finally he said, "What *should* I think? It occurs to me that what *you* think is vastly more important."

The Great Man had risen and was pacing the floor. "Harlan," he said. "I'm beginning to think the military is right. I'm beginning to believe that these UFO's are of alien origin. From the steadily increasing and consistent pattern of their appearances, I can only conclude that they are the prelude to some sort of invasion from space."

"Who'd want this little planet?" Harlan asked, with ironic bitterness. "It is already despoiled, overpopulated . . ."

"Not knowing the nature of our visitors," said the Great Man, "and not knowing their needs or desires, how can we answer such a question?" He paused, regarding his host steadily for an instant. Then he said: "You'll be glad to know I refused to permit hostile action, a stand which you yourself strongly urged me to take."

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"Thank you," said Harlan, simply and sincerely.

Something in his tone stopped the Great Man in his tracks. "Thank you," he said. "Why thank me? Harlan. Why are you staring at me like that?"

Harlan held his gaze, and nodded slowly. "It's true," he said. *"I'm one of them.* We have techniques—hypnotics and the like—to make the records misleading. Don't look so horrified, my friend. Although I am not of Earth, I'm human enough."

The Great Man sank into a chair, still staring in stunned horror at his advisor. "But Harlan," he said, "why have you done this to *me?* Where are you from? What do you and your people want?" He felt a sick dizziness at the base of his brain, such as he had not felt since the last election had hung precariously in the balance.

"You have asked me three questions," was the reply, "and none of them simple." A faint smile tugged at his lips. "However, I'll try to answer them to the best of my ability. Why have I done this *to* you? I scarcely believe, if you'll think back over the past few years, that I have done anything *to* you.

"The advice I gave you was sincerely given and it was in the best interests of your country, and your world. I may as well tell you I became your advisor because I was assigned to the task on my own world."

The Great Man could only keep staring at Harlan, wondering what his real name was, and whether he was seeing him as a human being only because Harlan had planned it that way.

Harlan went on quickly: "As to where we are from, I can only say the inhabited Galaxy. You see, there are hundreds of far-flung planets suitable for human life scattered among the stars of what you call the Milky Way."

"And precisely what do you want? Why are you invading Earth at this time?" the Great Man asked in a faraway voice.

"All we want," was the quiet reply, "is to see the people of your world become sufficiently mature to join the rest of us—without repeating some of the ghastly mistakes that certain other strong, primitive planetary societies have made. That is why I—and many others—have been given the assignment of trying to prepare you for your most difficult task — the early control of atomics.

"You speak of 'invasion.' What you are witnessing is actually quite the reverse. We have done all we can on Earth. The rest is up to you. The vessels which you call flying saucers are actually here to take us home."

The Great Man was on his feet again, somehow more alarmed by Harlan's last statement than by his previous fears. "But you're leaving us in a terrifying mess," he said. "Why can't you keep on helping us a little longer. Why can't you?"

Harlan slowly shook his head.

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"We have guided you as far as we can," he replied. "We cannot teach you to master yourselves. We have managed to bring you, without self destruction, to the final test. It will either take you to the stars or leave your planet a briefly glowing cinder in the skies. But we cannot take the examination for you."

"I see." The Great Man was humble beyond his habit. He was just beginning to realize how completely he had depended on Harlan to make his decisions for him. Without him . . . and without his wife . . . he would be like a small boy trying to run a business. A defiant spark flamed within him.

"I could give orders to have you confined—to keep you here," he said.

But Harlan shook his head. "You coulda't. I want you to leave me now. It will be easier that way. This is goodbye, my friend, unless fate wills us to meet out there." He nodded toward the windows and the glowing night sky beyond.

There was something in his manner which forbade disbelief. The Great Man shook his hand and, unexpectedly, there were tears in his eyes. Harlan put a sympathetic hand on his shoulder and said, "That is what will bring you through. You can love."

"Yes," said the Great Man. "We can love. I only hope it is enough."

"It will have to be," said Harlan, "for you have very little else." And there was something—a warning, perhaps—in his tone which echoed in the Great Man's ears long after he was back in the big car en route to his own house.

The taut excitement of a half hour earlier had vanished. His aides and bodyguards were casual, and relaxed, as if nothing out of the ordinary had happened. Wondering, more than a little frightened, the Great Man went upstairs to the apartment he occupied with his wife. He called to her but she did not answer. He searched for her but she was not there.

All at once, he *knew.* She, too, was one of them—the serene, wonderful woman who had, in a few short years, guided him from obscurity to the pinnacle, and whose quiet poise and steadfastness had brought him triumphantly through so much. When he looked in her closet, he was somehow not surprised to discover that his own things—his golf clubs and fishing gear—had replaced her removed garments.

He wandered out on the balcony. All at once a light flashed down out of the sky and hovered low, no more than a half mile away, over what had been Harlan's house. It hovered for an instant and then, suddenly, it was gone — and the Great Man felt alone as never before in his life. What had Harlan said—about love being enough? "It will have to be, for you have very little else."

The Great Man looked up at Orion, and the Big Dipper, and at Jupiter lurking low on the horizon.

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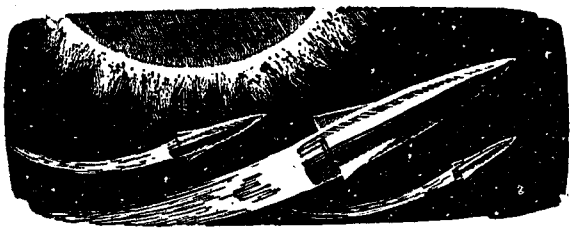
Somehow, he knew, mankind had passed a lot of tests, with a great deal of travail—and the big one still lay still ahead. He wondered about his opposite numbers around the Earth. Had they, too, had advisors from the stars?

That, he decided, was one intangible he was going to have to take for granted. As he went back inside, he was formulating plans to bring them all together, to get them over the last hurdle safely. And for the first time he had the feeling that, elsewhere in the world, sad but still-important great men and women were sharing his thoughts and emotions.

It wasn't a bad thing to know. Not a bad thing at all.



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device for decadence

by . . . Ethel G. Lewis

It seemed to Izak that he stood alone in a world where even the laughter of children was silenced. But with him walked—a multitude.

THAT MORNING, before they rose to wash and dress for the day, he put his face against the back of his wife's neck and waited with pounding heart. But Katri uttered no more than a fluttering sigh, and so he, too, kept silent. Getting out of bed, the scent of Katri's hair still more binding than thought or fear or spoken word, he went to the dresser to pick up the Directional which would go into his pocket when he was clothed.

The tape snapped into his hand and automatically he read the words by which each male in that year of 2005 daily guided his behavior:

> GUARD YOURSELF AGAINST SPURIOUS MANIFESTATIONS AND PLEASANTRIES. FRIENDLINESS LEADS TO DECADENCE. THE FOUNDATION OF OUR CIVILIZATION IS DUTY WELL PERFORMED.

It seemed to Izak as the words faded and the tape settled back into its holder, that the confines of his

"For years my son has been devouring science fiction," writes Ethel G. Lewis, "and finally on impulse I sat down and read several of the magazines seriously. Impulse turned to admiration, and my first idea for a story in this genre took root. I've sold a story to the very literary VIRGINIA LITERARY REVIEW, *but when I tell my friends I've sold a science fiction story their eyes pop. Writers of science fiction, they think, must be green-hued!" Well, perhaps a few are. But a first story as splendid as this one, Mrs. Lewis, would explain their excitement, even if SF writers were not the least bit emerald-hued.*

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body stretched with a flooding surge of doubt. It took at least thirty seconds for him to force his mind back to the normalcy of acceptance. Standing with head bowed, he listened to the soft sounds made by Katri's felt slippers. And presently, when they were seated for their breakfast of Elixir and Biscuit Vits, their eyes met in a hasty, guilt-heavy remembrance of his caress.

It was only during the past year that it had become so difficult for him to think of Katri as simply the woman who kept his home clean, called at the various Stations for most of the household supplies, served him his nourishment and provided him with a means for reproduction.

He and Katri had become a Unit six years ago, and if for most of those years, he was free of doubt, calm and efficient with duty clearly his motivation, what specifically had happened to change him? Had it been his meeting with Ebon Bolder and Given Bare?

Even as he thought the two names, his eyes went cold and his ears cocked for the tune of the Directional clicking in his pocket. He rose from the table without draining his glass of Elixir, averted his eyes from Katri's silent question and hastily left the house to walk with firm step toward the store where it was his job to dispense the oil cans used for keeping Directionals in good order. While the women did not wear pocket Directionals, they called regularly for the oil cans at Izak's Station and at others spotted through the district.

At the age of eighteen, the same year Katri had been brought to him so that the Humbert Unit would be formed, he had been designated a Dispenser and from that time to this he had been in sole charge of the Station. Approaching the door as it swung wide to allow him to enter, he found his thoughts jangled once again and heard with a prick of fear the slightly discordant clicking in his pocket.

Once more he laboriously emptied his thoughts, but one persisted, a memory which would not sink back with the others. And it was of Katri.

One afternoon a month was set aside for paired people to walk in the area where a canopy kept off the sunlight and provided a cool place to sit or walk. Was it, he pondered, two or three years ago that this had taken place? He recalled that a group of Young with their woman Guardian had been in the area for a Free Period.

Suddenly a small boy with a head of thick golden curls had broken from the group, his face distorted with terror, and gleaming with tears. "I lost it, oh, my Directional, I lost it . . . oh, oh, High Office, do not strike me down! I shall find it, I shall search until I find it . . ." And then with a scream he had begun to run.

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The Guardian had lifted her white sleeved arm in an attempt to hold the boy but he had slipped away. She had called once in a high abrupt voice, but the sobbing lad had seemed not to hear. Quiet had fallen on the area again, broken only by the low murmur of the Young as they sat in a half moon around the Guardian.

Moving on, Izak felt Katri's hand creep into his.

"At what age," she said in her sweet voice, "does a boy begin to wear a pocket Directional, Izak?"

"At the age of four," he told her.

The unprecedented act of Katri's hand slipping into his had disturbed him. His fear that his impulses would record in the Granite Room of the High Office began to throb in his temples. Actually it was not known whether the antenna in the atmosphere was infallible and all inclusive. Izak knew only that he hoped it was not . . . that Katri's touch and Katri's next words would not change his metabolism to a degree high enough to be caught by the overhead antenna.

"Izak"—her voice was a whisper—"I wish no Young. We have been together three years and before I wished for Young. Now I do not. The Young are tormented beyond endurance—by fear, by terror. I am yours, and upon the days designated I shall not resist. But I want no Young."

He could make no answer for he knew that the Young suffered many terrors. The loss of one's Directional twice, or injury to it, could result in even a child being summoned, and those who had been summoned seldom returned. These were placed in the category known as the Inadequates. Words, he thought. The growing up years were flooded with the words of the Guardian of Education. An endless stream of words repeated hour upon hour, until at the end of the day the Young were able to give quick, complete answers out of the brimming well of memory.

His rating had been high enough to accredit him for the Specialized Lectures. A mere handful out of his group had been chosen to learn the operation of planobiles. Half were on the Regular list and half on the Substitute List where his name was placed.

But that day he could not speak freely to Katri, and it seemed to him then that his life was replete with more silences than the air with antenna.

Arrived at his Station, he made his preparations for servicing the community with the shining oil cans. He dusted and he polished, and concurrently his thoughts ran fluid . . . for Katri was very much in his mind and fear for Katri had begun to haunt his waking hours. Was it recorded in the Granite Room that the Humbert Unit had produced no Young? It could not be otherwise. Ah, if Katri were taken from him!

Steady now, Humbert, he said

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aloud. His own defection lay in the Continuation Pills. It was three years now since he had been ordered to report to Ebon Bolder's Station for the Pills. Those males who produced reasonably soon after union, were not on order to report for the Pills. Only those, like Izak, who did not augment the population. They alone made the weekly visit, and slowly there rose in him as he worked a strange sense of gratitude that he was on order to obtain the Pills.

In this way he had met Ebon Bolder. A squarely built man with dark eyes which looked directly into his, Ebon sent forth an aura of strength. He did not speak and there was no waste motion in what he did. But his eyes were direct, and more than once Izak had felt that Ebon wanted to smile.

A small sound of derision now broke from his lips. GUARD YOURSELF AGAINST SPURIOUS MANIFESTATIONS AND PLEASANTRIES. Smiling was in this category. The whole community went about with stern faces. Had he ever heard anyone laugh? Only Given Bare. Once . . . that day in the field. Given Bare. The name was good in his mind and on his tongue. He felt himself swell to greater proportions on merely thinking the name. Given was the only man who had ever uttered the word Book. Book. Freedom.

That had been later, not on the first occasion of their meeting. "This is Given Bare," Ebon Bolder had said when first they had met in his Station. "Given, this is Izak Humbert." And then there had been silence and the look exchanged between Given and Ebon was such as Izak had never before seen between two men.

He had had the thought fleetingly that with two such men for his friends he need never again be lonely. And when Given drew back his hand with the packet of Continuation Pills in it, placed there by Ebon, he had turned to give Izak the same strong look and Izak had guessed the truth. He had known that Given did not swallow the pills, that either Given or his wife, or both, preferred not to bring Young into existence . . .

Behind him he heard the soft, blurred footsteps of a woman's slippers, and he turned. Just in time, he checked the upturning of his lips. More and more he had to be rigidly watchful. This was Gofrey Impak's wife and she came now to his counter to extend her hand. No greetings were exchanged while Izak took a polished can from a shelf and placed it into her palm. The woman inclined her head and went out.

Izak took the Ledger from its drawer and made a check mark on the page bearing the Impak name. It was vital to keep the records straight, for in this way the High Office was able to gather the data which enabled it to keep its finger on the pulse of dutifulness.

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A faint scent lingered in the Station after the departure of Gofrey Impak's woman. The scent brought Katri full to his mind, and he thought of Katri placing upon their table the flowers forbidden. A Scotching Crew was on duty sixteen hours a day to see to it that no seed was planted and that no flowers grew.

Once, it was whispered, a man had planted a few seeds in the sparse precious grains of earth he had scratched up from beneath one of the cement walks. The man had disappeared soon after, and for a week there was Conduct Lectures each night attended by both men and women. Over and over the Guardian's voice repeated, "Beware the flower for it speaks of softness and softness leads to decadence."

Yet, Katri had known no fear. Thinking this, his heart seemed to stir and move in its place as if seeking more room. He remembered the night he had returned from his Station. Upon the table was a small dish and in it reposed three tiny blue flowers.

"Katri," he had said hoarsely. "The flowers."

Her wide gray eyes had not evaded him. Very sweetly her lips had curved. "Yes, Izak," she said, "the flowers."

"When you saw them, you should have torn them out by the roots," he said, forcing harshness into his voice.

"I know," Katri said softly. "Flowers are devices for decadence." Speaking the words of the Conduct Lectures, Katri seemed not to believe in them. "I saw them on my way to the Nourishment Station. They were growing at the far edge of one of the cement walks. I think they must have sprung up overnight, they're so frail and delicate. I did not pick them at once. But on my way back, I caught their scent. I had to have them before the Scotching Crew arrived."

Katri paused and there was a quickening of her voice when she went on. "The flowers brought something to my mind, something from very long ago. Something which my mother might have known . . ."

Speaking of one's parents was frowned upon. Izak had disciplined himself to turn a harsher voice upon his Katri. "You must destroy them at once," he told her.

"Here, Izak!" Katri had moved swiftly toward the table. She cupped the tiny flowers in both her hands and came toward him. "I wanted you to see them. Now you must smell them and then of course I will crush them."

She lifted her hands toward him and he went close to her and bent his head and for one instant he was lost as the fragile scent of the flowers came fully against his face.

"Now . . ." whispered Katri.

She took a few steps back from him. His head still whirling, he watched as she lifted her hands breast high and then pressed them tightly together until the room was

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heady with the scent of the crushed flowers. After a moment, Katri turned and went to the brass container on its pedestal in one corner of the room. Here the perpetual flame burned for various uses, and into this cuplike shape Katri let the pitiful remnants drop as she slowly opened her hands.

The door swung open once more to permit a woman to enter. She was a slight fair person quick of gait and stern of face. She wore the traditional slim frock and the close head-covering which women were permitted to discard in very warm weather. On receiving the oil can in her hand, she lifted her eyes to him. *A smile,* he thought, *a smile lies in her eyes.*

"I am Given Bare's wife," she said in a low clear voice. "We have been moved to this community."

He nodded, turned the pages of the Ledger and wrote the name clearly across the top of a blank sheet. Then he made a large check against the date, and then almost without a vestige of dread, he let his mouth loosen into the forbidden smile and he said quietly, "Welcome."

"The Circle widens," she said and then she departed swiftly.

The arrival of another woman at once helped him hold firmly to his demeanor of severity. There were many betrayals among the people, and one never knew whose eyes were keen enough to discern the last faint trace of a smile. This woman was one he knew well. She was Orton Beak's woman, and now she extended a heavy, work worn hand.

She had drab gray hair but her eyes were fine, a lustrous, startling blue. She accepted the oil can and moved back the way she had come. He made the check on the Beak's page, and lifted his head to see with eyes refusing to believe that Orton Beak's woman was looking back and in that imperceptible moment before she stepped outside, one corner of her mouth lifted and a light danced in her eyes.

The next day, at sunrise he was requisitioned by direct contact on their ceiling panel, to pilot the quatro-motored planobile to the farm where grain was grown for the manufacture of Biscuit Vits. Here too the factory stood where the food was beaten and formed into the wafers, which were then boxed and tied into bales for dispersal. Another member of the male sector would take over his Station for the day, while he flew the planobile.

There were no more than a dozen who had this mechanical skill, and as he rose from the ground, his hands knowing and at ease upon the controls of the machine, he pondered on what had happened to Orton Beak who had held this post for many years. He almost panicked as thoughts rioted through his mind. Betrayal. Had Orton fallen prey to some device for decadence and been sum-

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moned? There was no way of finding out. Those who disappeared were never seen again.

As he neared the farm and sighted the tall grain waving in the mild breeze, his heart rose even as he set down the planobile. He was going to see Given Bare once more. He would stand close to this huge man from whom strength emanated in waves. He would again be forced, and so willingly, to look up into the warm, dark eyes of this man who was six feet six and whose thick hair was like a gay banner.

Given came striding toward him as he emerged from his seat, and he saw that he came with hand outstretched. Almost Izak ran. A gasp escaped him when at last they were close, their fingers linked, their eyes locked fast. Still maintaining the close contact, Given turned his head briefly, blew a whistle and then waved as a line of men carrying bales began to come from the Storage Room. Activity centered about the planobile some twenty yards off, and Izak's sense of safe isolation with Given grew deeper.

He had learned much from Given, much to give a man hope but he had not yet learned how to cast out fear. For one cowardly instant he wished that Given would not speak. But the quaking within him faded and ended as the eyes of Given Bare returned to fix him searchingly. The firm lips gentled into a smile and the grip of Given's fingers tightened and Izak became the sort of man Given could call friend.

"We have widened our non-contact period with the High Office," Given said. "There are fifteen minutes free of interception. Our own interception crew keeps the antenna clear. Each day, Izak, we unearth more books from beneath the cement walks. We have learned that tapes were used before this era. In a place called the Stock Market where business men measured the economies of the time.

"Many of these were unsmiling men, and our government copied much of its policy from them. And now this is our knowledge, Izak. It cannot be taken from us. As we spread our knowledge, the Circle widens and takes iron into itself, the iron of resolve. Each day we discover more friends among us, although some are still not without fear."

"I am one of these," Izak said with shame. "I strive for courage and it fails me over and over."

Given leaned close to him. "Do not despair. You are but twenty-four years old, Izak. I am thirty and have been intent upon forming the Circle since I was twenty. I have had ten years to scrabble beneath the cement for the buried books. You need more time, Izak, but you are one of us. And no man knows when he shall grow large in his spirit, and become wholly himself."

"I fear for Katri," Izak told him.

"Yes. Your Katri is one of us."

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Given's eyes were half closed in the strong sunlight. "Katri brought you the three blue flowers."

Izak's hand jerked in the strong clasp. He had not told Given of this incident!

"We intercepted that episode of the flowers," Given informed him gravely. "Our crew on Interception has grown skilled in the last several months as more and more books are found. There is no record in the Granite Room of High Office, Izak." Given hesitated and then spoke once more. "But Katri's name is on the maximum list as far as Reproduction. Seven years are usually allowed, yet for some reason her name has already been recorded. Our people—we have six stationed in key positions now—are watching, Izak. We know that you have constantly fought deep feeling for your wife."

Miraculously now he was filled with a surging of resolve. It coursed in his blood. When thoughts of Katri came to him, he was whole. He was as tall as Given and as strong.

"I love her," he said and had no way of knowing how the word had come to him.

Given's face seemed lighted. "You have caught the word from our messages. That is our newest development. We can now send isolated words like love and trust and hope out into the atmosphere. Our radar underground is rapidly digesting what we find in the books and then spreading it."

Now Given's face sobered and he stepped free of Izak. "We have managed to place three in the High Office," he said. "Our people. That means strength in the Core of Today's Regime, Izak. Our people in the very Core of the government. Now listen. We seek not perfection, Izak, so our goal is possible. We have learned. Each time we find another book, we learn. A century ago people were free, but often they were indifferent.

"They were ashamed but they stayed indifferent to the suffering of others. Of some we learn twisted, puzzling facts. A world stood aside and did nothing while genocide was practiced by one nation upon another. But individuals cared, and many sacrificed themselves. There have been no books in the last forty years because the government wished us to know only what we were taught by word of mouth through our Guardians. But now we know what transpired in the era before ours. Now, we are armed!"

Given's face went stern and without another word he left Izak. Their time had run out, Izak realized. The precious fifteen minutes had been used up.

After reporting to the Receiving Center with his cargo, Izak made his way homeward, thinking of Katri. Might it be a man's portion in life, he pondered, to love his wife not by rote on the days designated on the tape, but rather from a mutual quickening between

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husband and wife? Katri did not come forward as he entered the house, and he stopped short in the hall with a sudden burst of panic. And in the pause the clicking in his pocket grew louder, more insistent. Drawing out the tape, he stood stoned by shock. He read:

IZAK HUMBERT:
Your volition grows, your control weakens. Your name has been moved into the intensified watch department. Your wife, Katri, has been taken under advisement.

The last sentence pounded in his head. Katri! He began to run through the rooms, calling her name. But there was silence. There was no whisper of her presence until the very silence became like thunder in his ears. They had taken Katri, had put their hands upon her!

Given Bare, he thought. Rushing from the house, the name of this man alone kept him sane. He knew that, walking, it would take him half an hour to reach the farm. Without hesitation or doubt he flung his Directional against a massive stone wall as he passed and felt his heart leap as the tape holder shattered into small pieces. "No man knows when he shall grow large in his spirit, and become wholly himself." Given had spoken those words to him barely an hour before. And now for him, Izak Humbert, the coward's panic was gone forever.

All about him on the streets were people returning from their various stations, and after a time he saw that many eyes were turned upon him searchingly. He saw a man smile and then another whispered to him, "Friend." There was a great rhythm in his brain and a great sense of his own resolve. They shall not take Katri from me!

Another man halted and looked intently at him and then smiled and turned to walk along with him. And another . . . "Friend," was whispered now on either side of him. He knew that behind him walked many men and women. Each man joining us puts iron into our Circle, he thought, remembering other words of Given Bare.

He held out his hand and touched a man's shoulder and the man's eyes were lighted. Another man and another woman reversed their steps to join him. One by one they came, and then in pairs. He had only to look into a face to see that its smile and its shining eyes were but a reflection of his own.

"Friends," he said firmly and he knew the sound of his voice was strong.

"Friends," they murmured in chorus. The sound of their footsteps became a common sound, one that linked brothers bent upon the same purpose.

When Izak reached the gates of Given Bare's Farm Station, and they swung wide to permit passage, he did not enter alone but as one of a great, surging throng.

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infant prodigy

by . . . F. B. Bryning

Joan knew nothing of Dr. Rhine's famed Duke University experiments in telepathy. She was just herself —in the future's bright unfolding.

WITH THOUGHTFUL deliberation, Dr. James Ballantine, psychiatrist, stepped from the elevator house on to the rooftop of the Arthur Buckley Plant Development Institute. He crossed the small trellised enclosure, released the head-high catch on the gate, and opened it gently.

Tiny pink fingers hooked around the gate, low down, and tugged it wide open. A lemon-frocked and bonneted baby girl flung herself at his knees. He picked her up and submitted gladly to a throttling embrace and a long, moist kiss on his cheek.

"Hello, sweetheart!" he said when he had her sitting upright on his arm, accompanying the greeting with a smile. "Let me look at you. Are you well, Joan?"

She nodded vigorously, her velvet-brown, almost black, eyes dancing.

"H-ll-w -ncle B-ll-nt-ne," she replied in a husky, vowel-less whisper, slowly but with clear, painstaking lip movements. Thus well, by sedulous training, had her mother taught her to speak despite her lack of vocal cords.

Ballantine carried her through

Do you remember this brightly gifted Australian writer's earlier, atomic-age story about the mutant strawberry and the child which Dr. Elizabeth Buckley, Director of the Plant Development Institute was determined to bring into the world? Well . . . here is that baby, grown to chubby, appealing dimensions and with gifts "like no other child." And F. B. Bryning, we're convinced, is "like no other writer." Together, they send the entertainment meter soaring.

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into the garden, carefully closing the gate. Just before they reached the front door of the penthouse the child wriggled to be put down. She took him by the hand and led him into the hall where her tall, auburn-haired mother, widow of the founder of the Institute, and now its Director, awaited them.

The child hurried into the lounge. When Dr. Ballantine and her mother followed her she was seated at her small nursery table, with her bonnet off, and her frosty, albinoid hair gleaming. She seemed almost doll-like as she sat there waiting, her parted lips eager with anticipation.

"No time yet for adult conversation, Jim," said Dr. Elizabeth Buckley, smiling. "That table was brought in here early this morning, and the cards set out. She knew, without my telling her, that you were coming today."

"The matter was in your mind more than once, no doubt," Dr. Ballantine said, significantly.

Dutifully Ballantine took his seat in the easy-chair across the table from Joan. Before him was a small pack of cards, face downwards. In front of the child was a long box with a hinged lid, like a case in which carvers are kept. With tilted chin and quite calmly the twenty-nine-months-old little girl awaited the ritual of checking.

Under her eyes Ballantine sorted his cards, face upwards, into five groups. There were five cards with a large cross on each, five with a circle, five with a square, five with a star, and five with three parallel wavy lines. Ballantine swept them together, shuffled them thoroughly, and laid them down. Joan stood up, cut them, and placed them before Ballantine, face downwards.

Joan opened her case. In each of five compartments there were five cards of each symbol. She took out one group at a time and counted back the cards into their compartments. Then she raised the lid and fixed a brace to hold it vertically, shielding the cards from Ballantine's sight.

He took the top card from his pack. Over-acting his role of hiding it from her, he peeped at the symbol—a star.

Promptly Joan took a card from her case and laid it face downward on the table, her eyes twinkling with mischief.

Ballantine laid his card face downwards. His next bore a circle. Joan selected another card, and, giggling, covered her first one with it.

So they went, card by card, through the twenty-five in each pack. As she put her last card down the little girl clasped her hands and rocked backwards and forwards, laughing silently.

Her mother took the child's pack and turned it face upwards as Ballantine did the same with his. On top of his pack was a star—on Joan's three parallel waved lines. At the mock disappointment on the

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adults' faces the child grinned with delight.

Next, Ballantine presented a circle. Joan's pack showed a cross. There was more adult dismay—and more childish glee. And so on, right through both packs. Not one card in Joan's pack correctly matched its opposite in Ballantine's. Sadly the adults shook their heads while the child rocked with laughter.

"We'll have to try again," sighed Ballantine, shuffling his cards while Elizabeth Buckley sorted Joan's into her box. "Something must be wrong."

Taking her cue, Joan came around the table and searched his coat pocket, producing a small package.

"Of course!" Ballantine exclaimed. "That must be the trouble." He held out his hand. "But you can't have it yet. You must get the cards right, first."

She dimpled happily. The ritual was being followed wonderfully to her liking. She returned the package to Ballantine, who put it on the piano stool. When he returned she was ready and waiting behind her box.

Ballantine's first card was a square. Joan slapped her card down. His next was a star. Her second went down at once. In quick time they followed through—this time without the laughter but with mounting excitement.

Joan was out of her chair and standing by the piano stool before they began to check. This time every pair of cards matched. Ballantine clapped his hands.

"B-nn-h?" inquired the child, her eager hands almost on the package. "B-nn-h f-h J—n?" At his ostentatious nod she swept up the package and sat on the floor to open it.

"Really, Jim, I think this game ought to be dropped," protested Elizabeth Buckley as she restored the cards to the case. "It's only an entirely feminine game to her now, to get a gift out of you every time you come."

Ballantine shrugged. "It's as good a game as any, Elizabeth, for as long as she gets fun out of it. I agree we don't need it now to find out whether she has some kind of extra-sensory perception. We know that. Now we're mainly studying the development of a proved telepath—keeping a case history, and so on. Meanwhile, Rhine's 'ESP cards' still tell us something."

"Do they?"

"Yes. They prove that she is still in command of her already confirmed abilities. She is not becoming confused by her widening apprehension of new things as she grows older—or by her own teasing of us when she deliberately selects the wrong cards. You will notice that she is always either a hundred percent right or a hundred percent wrong—and either performance is equally good. In every case she has to know precisely what card I am holding."

"P-nk b-nn-h!" announced Joan,

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having unwrapped her package. She held up a china rabbit, pink in color, for her mother to admire. She went to kiss Ballantine, in thanks. Having done so she promptly patted his other pocket. "Bl-h b-nn-h!" she whispered. "Bl-h b-nn-h!"

Ballantine threw up his hands. "It's no use, Elizabeth! We can't expect to keep anything from her—anything she's able to understand. Here am I with another little game in mind with a blue bunny, twin of the pink one, as a prize. But she already knows about the blue bunny in my pocket. And that proves she can play the new game, before we try it."

Laughing, Elizabeth Buckley picked up her mutant daughter. "That sort of thing is happening to me, more and more, these days," she said. "Do you still wish to play the new game?"

"Oh, yes," Ballantine assured her. "I still want it on record. And Joan must have her prize." He took the package from his pocket and put it on the piano stool.

"J—n's bl-h b-nn-h!" pronounced the child.

"After you play Uncle Ballantine's new game," said her mother, putting her down. "Jim, excuse me while I start the tea."

This time, with Joan in her usual place and her mother opposite in the easy-chair, Ballantine took a pencil and scribbling pad from his pocket and seated himself in the farthest corner of the room. Elaborately shielding what his pencil was doing, he said, challengingly: "Joan doesn't know what I am drawing!"

Carefully he drew three waved lines.

Joan eyed him from across the room. Then she grinned, picked up a card, and laid it face down on the table. On the next page Ballantine drew a square. Joan put her next card down. Ballantine drew a circle —then a star—a cross. Each time Joan put down a card.

"Now Mummy, may we check them, please?"

Without error the cards matched the drawings—and in correct order.

"Joan knows how to play this game," Ballantine acknowledged. "Now I shall draw something else. Joan will find it and give it to Mummy."

Returning to his corner he quickly sketched a tea-cup. Instantly Joan went to the traymobile, lifted the linen drape over the afternoon tea things, took a cup and carried it to her mother.

"That's right!" applauded Ballantine.

Joan waited, her huge dark eyes agleam.

He drew a narrow, trumpet-shaped vase. The child trotted to the big plate-glass window which overlooked the Institute's experimental farms, six stories below, and took the Indian brass vase from the wide, low sill to her mother.

Next Ballantine drew a small chair of the same design as Joan's nursery chair. Promptly that chair

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was picked up and set before her mother.

He began to draw again. There was a clink as Joan took a teaspoon from the traymobile, and another clink as she put it into the cup in front of Elizabeth Buckley.

"Hey!" protested Ballantine. "I haven't finished drawing that!" Then, tongue in cheek, he sketched two big ears and a rabbit face, wishing hard that he had a blue pencil.

"J—n's bl-h b-nn-h!" the child whispered, running to the piano stool.

Ballantine laughed.

"It's your bunny now, Joan."

Over afternoon tea, Ballantine explained. "I had intended, if Joan could draw well enough, to try some experiments in telepathy like those Upton Sinclair and his wife made about fifty years ago—back in 1928, I think it was. But Joan took time by the forelock, so I improvised a bit."

"What kind of experiments?" Joan's mother asked.

"I must bring you 'Mental Radio', Sinclair's own account of them," Dr. Ballantine said. "Briefly, he would sit in a closed room and draw something—say an umbrella—and concentrate mentally on it. His wife would sit in another closed room, concentrating on him, and would draw or write down 'whatever came into her mind.' They got some remarkable successes, many partial successes, and still more failures."

"For example?" asked Dr. Buckley.

"Well, when he drew a sailing boat she wrote down 'sailboat.' He drew three linked circles and she drew three linked circles. He drew a cone and she drew a cone. There were quite a number of others, equally accurate. But there were more 'partial successes,' as when he drew an hour-glass and she wrote 'white sand.' He drew a bat flying, and she wrote 'beetle, working its legs.' He drew a skull and cross-bones, and she wrote 'bug, with legs'. And there were many complete failures. I thought Joan would be able to do that sort of thing and score a high percentage."

"I don't think she could draw well enough," Elizabeth Buckley said.

"I suppose not," Ballantine conceded. "We might try some other time. But when she named the blue bunny in my pocket I knew what to do. She scored a hundred percent, as usual."

"And what does it prove?" Joan's mother asked.

"Little more than we knew already. But you will see that Rhine's 'ESP cards' give Joan a restricted and predetermined set of only five symbols to think about, and they limit me, as 'sender,' to those same five symbols. By guessing, alone, any non-telepath can score *some* successes, as J. B. Rhine himself proved and allowed for in his work at Duke University. But Sinclair's method, where it succeeds, is a much more positive demonstration

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of telepathy. He, as 'sender,' might select anything in the universe—one thing out of millions. The person who 'receives' that thing, or several such things, clearly and definitely, as Mrs. Sinclair did, is doing something much more significant than achieving a high score with 'ESP cards'."

"I see that," Elizabeth Buckley poured him a second cup of tea. "What of the partial successes and the failures?"

"I think they show the difference between Joan and the rest of us. There is reason to suspect that we all have some slight and fleeting capacity for telepathy. Mrs. Sinclair and others may have had better-than-average capacity, however fragmentary, fugitive, and uncontrollable. But Joan has it like a fully developed sixth sense. It works all the time, with her."

Elizabeth Buckley frowned. "But don't you think she must have quite a few failures and only partial successes, too—even if they are only caused by her difficulty with adult thoughts beyond her mental capacity?"

"I agree," Ballantine said, nodding. "But she never seems to miss on anything within her understanding."

Joan had taken her two china bunnies to her nursery. Now she returned, hugging a coal-black kitten, which she brought right up to Ballantine and dropped in his lap. "K-tt-h!" she said. "J—n's K-tt-h!"

"You will see the finding of the kitten in a Report Sheet," explained Elizabeth Buckley a few minutes later, as she handed Ballantine some written notes. "A good item for the records, I think—one of our first animal contacts."

Ballantine nodded. He was watching Joan and the kitten playing "follow the leader," the kitten in front—around the piano, behind the door, under the table . . . And for the hundredth time he was speculating whether there could be any relationship between the albinoid skin and hair, the almost black irises, the lack of vocal cords, and the telepathic ability of the child. Between these seemingly random mutations he could see only one thing in common—their origin in the same over-exposure to radioactivity which had caused the death of her father before she was born.

"When did you get the kitten?" he asked.

"One day last week, when I went to look at the new tomato mutants," Elizabeth Buckley replied. "I took Joan with me for the outing. It was a good opportunity, with only two mental contacts—Mr. Johnston who runs the tomato farm, and his wife."

"Did they give it to her?"

"No," Elizabeth Buckley said. "Joan found it. We were walking past some huge stacks of boxes which had just been delivered into the yard. Suddenly Joan stopped. She turned into a narrow alley between stacks. Then she turned

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again, and we lost sight of her. I was annoyed, and a bit scared, because those stacks aren't perfectly stable. I followed her, and Mr. Johnston came too.

"Joan went quite a distance, turning left, right, and left again. We found her squatting on the ground, talking to the kitten, which was imprisoned inside a case at the bottom of a stack. It was mewing faintly, and putting out a tentative paw. Somehow it must have been brought in with the boxes the day before.

"I took Joan away while Mr. Johnston worked the box out to rescue the kitten. There were tears and struggles, for Joan objected to leaving. But Mr. Johnston wouldn't risk disturbing the stack while we were there. From the moment he brought it out the kitten and Joan have been almost inseparable. Joan demanded a drink for the kitten at once. Mrs. Johnston gave it some milk, and it certainly was thirsty."

"Could she have *heard* the mewing, do you think?" Ballantine asked.

"Impossible, I'm sure," Joan's mother answered. "The kitten was too far away when she started after it. There were two big stacks of boxes between them. And Mr. Johnston and I were talking."

"So it seems she picks up animal mental impulses, too."

Elizabeth Buckley gently stirred her tea. "Apparently. I notice she always knows just where to find the kitten about the house and garden. She never searches for it. She goes straight to wherever it is. And as often as it follows her she follows it—under tables, under her cot, on all fours along the window sill there, around behind the sofa—anywhere!"

"If she's getting the kitten's mental images she's probably trying to share its pleasures," said Ballantine. Then he grinned. "Has she tried to lap up milk with it yet?"

"Jim! How awful!"

"Is it—really?" He chuckled. "Hygienically it is, of course. But as companionship it is admirable. More than one child has done that, and without being a telepath. Doesn't Joan share *her* food with the kitten—or try to?"

"Why, yes," said Elizabeth Buckley, surprise in her voice. "I didn't think of that as the same thing. But it is, of course, if you leave hygiene out of it. Do you think there is any harm in her sharing the kitten's impulses?"

"I shouldn't think so," Ballantine said, thoughtfully. "I must consider it. Presumably an animal's impulses are simple, direct, and uncomplicated. Better than many human ones, no doubt. I should think Joan would quickly learn by experience that what the kitten anticipates with joy is not always such fun to her. Also she should find the kitten quite unable to enjoy some of her pleasures."

"I have noticed, too," said Elizabeth Buckley, "that when she and the kitten are absorbed in their own affairs, Joan is less likely to take

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notice of what I am thinking. Several times I have had to use my voice quite loudly to get her attention."

"That," said Ballantine, "might be quite important. It suggests a possible means of insulating herself from that ever-threatening mental babel we have always feared for her. Deep absorption in some interest may enable her to do for herself some part of what you do for her now. I mean that special rapport she has with you when in your arms."

"Let us hope so," said Elizabeth Buckley, rising to move the traymobile. "I won't always be— Oh *no! No!*"

With eyes dilated and blanched cheeks Joan's mother was staring, horror-stricken, out through the open French windows.

Ballantine sprang to his feet. He saw Joan, on her hands and knees, on the breast-high parapet which encircled the rooftop. A yard or so ahead was the kitten. They had climbed up a trellis which screened the roof garden from the laundry drying yard, and made a corner with the parapet. Joan, now two yards along the wall, got to her feet.

Together the two adults rushed to the French windows. Simultaneously each put out a hand to restrain the other.

"Careful—no panic," cautioned Ballantine. "You go and just take her off into your arms. I'd better not try. She and I fool too much!"

"She'll know what I'm thinking," worried Elizabeth Buckley, as the child began to walk after the cat, "and lose her confidence."

"She hasn't noticed us yet," countered Ballantine. "She must be absorbed in the game. Don't call her. Just think—or whisper something irrelevant to yourself. 'Mary had a little lamb'—anything."

With a nod, Elizabeth Buckley was already on her way, unhurried and outwardly calm, her lips moving soundlessly.

The kitten saw her coming. Now five or six yards along the parapet, it hesitated, looked back at Joan, and then jumped down amongst the pots and troughs of the garden. Scampering back to the trellis, it scrambled up again, and then disappeared along the parapet on the other side.

Half-way to Joan, Elizabeth Buckley despairingly watched the child turn on the low-cambered sixteen-inch cap of the wall and follow the kitten.

Joan darling—wait for me! The thought came unbidden, her agonized eyes fixed on the child.

"Mary had a little lamb . . ."

But the silken, white hair blew in the breeze and the chubby pink legs marched on . . . Undisturbed, Joan reached the trellis, put a hand on it to steady herself, and passed beyond it.

At that moment Elizabeth Buckley tripped and fell headlong into the garden.

Joan! Joan! Come back, darling! She neither cried out nor uttered a sound. But she could not hold back

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her desperate, anguished mental cry of despair. *Joan! Come back!*

Ballantine threw caution to the winds and ran along the house wall to the trellis gate, trying to think up some fabulous bribe to induce Joan to pause—until he realized that she would see through any such trick. He never improved on that idea, for when he burst through the gate the child was not to be seen.

Horror-stricken, he saw that the parapet was clear except for the kitten, now seated and watching him with wide, innocent eyes. The clean, wind-swept drying yard was empty.

Sick at heart he rushed to the parapet, to hoist his head and shoulders over it. He forced himself to look down, dreading what he might see.

"Oh my darling, my darling!" came Elizabeth Buckley's voice through the trellis. "Oh God!"

Back through the gate tore Ballantine, not knowing quite why. Haggard and tense, he plowed his way amongst tubs and pots to her side.

In a gust the breath came out of him, with relief at the sight of Elizabeth Buckley, still half-lying amongst the plants, scratched, torn and disheveled, but with her small daughter in her arms.

The child's husky whisper came to him as, with her head on her mother's shoulder, she stroked her mother's cheek.

"P—r M-mm-h! N-t fr-ght-n n-nh m-re. J— c-me b-ck. N-t fr-ght-n n-nh m-re. J-st s-re f—t."

Through brimming eyes Elizabeth Buckley looked over the baby's head at Ballantine as he raised her to a sitting position. She smiled wanly, the tears glistening on her cheeks. "Joan came back to help me, Uncle Ballantine, because I fell over. *In my heart* I cried out to her."

"And you're not frightened any more," he confirmed.

"J-st s-re f—t," added Joan.

"She's right," said her mother, as Ballantine dried her cheeks with his breast pocket handkerchief. "I have hurt my ankle. But I didn't notice it, until now."

While Ballantine helped Elizabeth Buckley inside, Joan clung to her. The baby's head pressed against her bosom, with a cradling warmth that aroused all of her protective instincts and filled her with a strange rejoicing. But for the first time in her experience the mother felt that she was unable to fulfill her proper role. Several times she tried to put the child down until her emotional turmoil could subside, but little Joan clung all the more tightly.

"I'm afraid, Jim," Elizabeth Buckley said, propped up on a couch while Ballantine applied a cold compress to her ankle, "I just can't achieve the required cool, calm, and collected frame of mind just now. Joan's clinging to me in the usual manner, but I think our roles are reversed. I still feel terri-

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fied. She is calming *me,* if anything. I'm sure I'm not helping her."

Not for ten minutes more did Joan consent to be put down. Ballantine closed the French windows to keep her from the garden.

"If this sort of thing can happen," said Elizabeth Buckley, when the child had gone to her room, "we'll have to leave the penthouse."

"I should hope not," protested Ballantine. "If you lived on the ground there would be many more hazards for Joan. She'd be exposed to dangerously haphazard mental contacts and many more animal contacts, with gates left open, traffic, and so on. I think this is still the ideal place to provide her with the necessary isolation—if we can keep her from marching along the cap of that wall again. If you have the trellis brought back from the parapet about five feet she'd never be able to climb up there a second time while she's too young to understand the danger."

"Should I get rid of the kitten?" Elizabeth Buckley asked, her voice tremulous.

"I don't know. Admittedly it led her into this danger—or that's what we suspect. But when we eliminate the means of climbing up there again, or anywhere else, she will be unable to follow the kitten into such danger."

"But she's so susceptible. There may be other dangers. She'll be led into them all."

"There are fewer hazards on this rooftop than anywhere else I can imagine," Ballantine assured her. "And don't forget, Elizabeth, that the very faculty that makes her so susceptible is the same faculty by which she is learning to share your awareness of what seems safe or unsafe to you. She is much more likely than any other child to learn early to approve or disapprove of what her mother approves or disapproves. She may take telling no better than any other child. But she can gain an emotional awareness of why and wherefore through sharing your awareness."

"I don't quite see—"

"Well, you might still have to restrain her from, say, sharing the cat's milk. Suppose you do. You can, I think, be sure she will learn to reject such delights all the sooner because she will feel and share your revulsion at the same time as you admonish her."

"I hope you're right."

"So do I," Ballantine affirmed. "Don't forget that the faculty that betrayed her into following the kitten also enabled her to walk in danger with a confidence similar to the kitten's. And it brought her back into safety in answer to your mental cry of anguish. Remember—'in your heart' you cried out to her, and not with your voice. If only you—"

He broke off as Joan, in tears, came running from the nursery.

"M-mm-h l—k!" she pleaded in her tensest whisper, and pointed out through the French windows,

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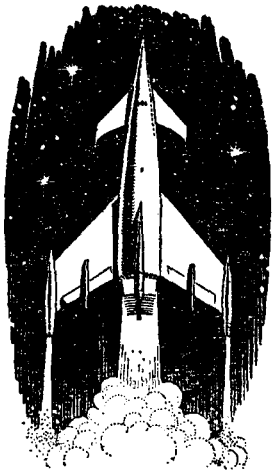
where the kitten was again walking along the parapet. "K-tt-h! G-t K-tt-h! K-tt-h f-ll d-wn—g-t sm-sh!"

Ballantine glanced once at the kitten, and swung round. "Hear that?" he demanded, his eyes shining. "She has already learned—"

"From my fear," agreed Elizabeth Buckley, the strained look of the past quarter-hour leaving her face at once. Then in another tone of voice, appropriately urgent, yet cheerful, she asked:

"Uncle Ballantine, will you please take Kitty off the wall? Joan and I are frightened she'll fall right down to the ground—and get smashed!"



CONAN, MAN OF DESTINY

By Robert E. Howard & L. Sprague de Camp

When modern science disrupted the atom, exceeded the sound barrier and sent radar signals to the moon it soared into the realm of the miraculous on shining wings. But every age, no matter how marvellous, must have its great, legendary human figures too, its Don Quixotes and Arthurian knights triumphant who come riding up over the horizon on milk-white steeds. And where, in fantasy's wide domain, will you find a titan as CONAN, MAN OF DESTINY, *who appears in our next issue in a new Conan saga, under the twin bylines of* L. Sprague de Camp *and the late* Robert E. Howard? *Here, indeed, is a novelette that's sure to enthrall you, if you'll but move with celerity to reserve your copy now.*

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the magnificent profession

by . . . Leonard Lockhard

Krome was Mr. Patent Office in person—and a hard man to needle. But Marchare's underground diving suit had a very sharp point to it.

THE INTEROFFICE buzzer on my phone rang. It was Helix Spardleton, patent attorney extraordinary—and my boss.

"Saddle?" Helix said. "Marchare is on the phone. Take care of him, will you?" And he hung up.

For a moment I just sat there, phone in hand. Marchare! My palms were suddenly moist. Other patent lawyers had nice normal scientists to work with—people who invented new and patentable plastics, pharmaceuticals, and insecticides.

I had Marchare. My mind ran back over some of his inventions—synthetic babies, supersonic washing machines, hair-growing chemicals. Collectively they had netted him a small fortune, but they had brought nothing but headaches to me. Now he was on the phone again. Another invention undoubtedly.

My forefinger shook a little as I stabbed it at the lighted button on the phone. "Saddle speaking," I said.

"Good morning, Carl!" came cheerily. "This is Marchare. You sound a little weak. You're not ill, I hope?"

Leonard Lockhard is an experienced patents attorney who can slip the glove-like surfaces of an inventor's nightmare on his writing hand with a dexterity glorious to behold. We suspect he even does so in his dreams, chuckling right merrily until the dawn breaks through. You'll chuckle too, we think, at one of the most uproariously funny SF yarns it has ever been our privilege to publish.

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"Well, I'm not feeling exactly—"

"Glad to hear it. Look, I wonder if you could drop over at my lab. I've run across something interesting, and I think we ought to investigate the patent possibilities."

I swallowed dryly. "What is it?"

"A diving suit."

I pondered his reply suspiciously. Was it conceivable that "Doc" had finally thought up a beautiful routine invention for me to work with—one that wouldn't get me all fouled up with the Patent Office? It wasn't too likely. Still—a diving suit. How could I get into trouble with a mere diving suit? Surely I was on safe ground there.

I said, "Fine, Doc. Shall I come over now?"

"The sooner the better," he replied. "I'll wait for you."

"Is there anything I should bring along? The camera?"

"Your notebook is all you'll need," he assured me. "I'm not yet ready to test it underground. See you soon." He hung up.

I hung up myself and had half risen from my desk when I suddenly stiffened. *Underground*. His diving suit worked underground! I was plenty startled, but as I thought it over I decided that Marchare must have been mistaken. He'd meant *underwater*—just a slip of the tongue. Sure, that was it. Who ever heard of a diving suit that went underground? It was too fantastic.

I felt better almost immediately. I got my hat and notebook and went out into the bright sunshine and hailed a cab.

On the way to Marchare's laboratory I did some thinking. He was a brilliant man capable of almost anything, a man who seldom made mistakes. His tongue wouldn't slip—not on a thing like that. If he said underground he meant underground. It was a statement I had to accept.

By the time the cab pulled up in front of Marchare's laboratory in Alexandria I knew exactly where I stood. I knew for sure that he had gone and invented a diving suit that would go underground.

"Doc" Marchare was dressed in his usual clothes, which is just another way of saying he looked as though he'd only recently got back from an unsuccessful, but jovial panhandling expedition.

"You got over here quickly, Carl. You're anxious to get going, eh?"

I forced a sickly smile.

"That's the spirit," he said, thumping me on the shoulder. "Come along, let's have a look at it."

He led me down the hall and into a cluttered work room where Hamilton Eskew, his cadaverous assistant, was working on something that looked like a large pair of coveralls.

Marchare said, "I'll describe the suit to you. If you have any questions just break in and ask them. It's really quite simple."

I said, "Uh-huh," pulled out my

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notebook, flexed my fingers, and was all set.

"Externally," he said, "it closely resembles any self-contained underwater suit. The body portion is all in one piece. The helmet clamps down over the head, and the pack on the back contains the power supply. Any power supply can be used so long as it delivers approximately ten amperes at ten thousand volts for a reasonable period of time."

I scribbled busily. "Got it," I told him.

"The current passes to a cabbagite crystal, then to a selector box, and finally to the surface of the suit," he went on. "Control dials mounted inside the hands of the suit enable the operator to control the amount of current at various places on the surface."

I broke in, "Cabbagite sounds familiar. Precisely what is it?"

"Well," said Marchare, "I'm not quite certain. Carbon, you see, occurs in two allotropic crystalline forms—diamonds and graphite. I've prepared a third allotrope that I call cabbagite. It is a twinned crystal with peculiar properties, to say the least. When an electromotive force is impressed at one end of it the other end emits energy of varying wave lengths. The bombardment of this energy seems to nullify the cohesive forces between the molecules of matter.

"Up until now the only use I could find for it was in transforming oxygen to ozone. When you plug it into the wall socket, you have a wonderful cabbage-cooking deodorizer. Spardleton filed a case on that use a couple of years ago. A few weeks ago I discovered the crystal had other possibilities. I've now discovered that it works on solid matter as well as oxygen. The solid matter yields and flows when pushed on by a conductive object that is connected to an activated cabbagite crystal."

I asked, "But how does the cabbagite crystal allow the diving suit to move around underground—through solid earth?"

Out of the corner of my eye I noticed that Eskew was shaking his head in sneering compassion for my slow-witted grasp of the technical details. But Marchare didn't mind a bit, having had long experience with patent attorneys.

"Well," he said, "the energy from the crystal goes first to a selector unit. From there it passes to the surface of the suit by means of thousands of tiny wire leads. These leads connect to a wire fabric imbedded in the thin rubber from which the suit is made. Is that clear?"

"Of course," I assured him loftily, ignoring Eskew's subdued snicker.

"The control dials work this way," continued Marchare. "Once the diver is underground he can cut off the energy field beneath the soles of his feet. Thus he will have something solid to stand on. When he walks, though, he will

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have to keep the soles of his feet pointed away from the direction of his advance, or retreat, because only the ground under his soles will always be solid. Either that, or he can adjust the controls each time he moves his foot.

"The control built into the right hand will control the right half of the suit; the left hand one will control the left. The energy field over the rest of the suit isn't so important as long as it is strong enough to soften the surrounding earth. But even so we're going to make it possible for the diver to control the energy field on the entire surface. That way he could even lie down if he wanted to."

"Since you haven't finished the suit yet," I said, "how do you know it will work?"

Eskew looked up at me as though I had just taken a dime from a five-year-old.

Marchare never turned a hair. "Oh, it will work all right. We've already made a great many tests. We've thrust objects through walls and rocks and metals. Hamilton hasn't actually finished the diving suit. But when he does, you can rest assured it will come up to expectations."

"What," I asked, "happens to the diver if the crystal stops functioning while he's underground?"

"Now there's a disturbing thought," mused Marchare. "I guess the suit would be lost. Gravity would pull it down to the center of the earth."

Eskew cackled mirthlessly. "And would the diver be burned up."

Marchare smiled indulgently. "A card, that Hamilton. Actually, there'd be no pain. Ham has timed the air supply to fail long before the diver can reach the center of the earth."

The hair on the back of my neck relaxed a little. I forced myself to consider only the legal aspects of the subject at hand. "When will the suit be ready?" I asked.

"In about four months," grunted Eskew. "Possibly a little sooner."

"That's good," I told him. "I think the Patent Office may want a demonstration. If I can prepare and file the application within the next two weeks, the Office will probably take it up just about the time the suit is ready."

"What I don't understand," said Marchare, "is how we can file a patent application on something that doesn't yet exist. Won't it be perjury for me to sign the inventor's oath?"

"That would depend on what oath you sign," I told him. "Fortunately there are two kinds. In one you swear that everything in the application is true. In the second you merely swear that the object described in the specifications is your invention. I never heard of any inventor using the first kind. You don't think Selden ever actually *made* the automobile he patented, do you?"

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"I see," he said, with an expression that said he didn't at all.

I looked over my notes. Mr. Spardleton had previously explained that it was useless to take notes on a new invention because the attorney's version never agreed with the inventor's. What was even worse, neither bore any resemblance to the hash the patent examiners would inevitably make of it. My notes were sufficiently confused to gladden the heart of any practicing patent attorney.

"Well, I guess that's it," I said.

I shook hands with Marchare, returned Eskew's sneer cordially, and headed back to town. Plans for the coming tussle with the Patent Office were beginning to take shape in my head. But I foresaw no great difficulty. This was *real* invention. Imagine. A diving suit that went underground. Even the Examiner would have to admit that this was creative originality of the highest order. He couldn't turn me down. He wouldn't dare.

When I got back to the office I went in and explained the whole thing to Spardleton. He heard me all the way through without an interruption. When I had exhausted my vocabulary of superlatives he sat quietly for a moment thinking. Then he said, "Yes, it seems straightforward enough. I'll tell you what. Make a search and pull a couple of patents that describe the usual diving suits. You will be able to use large portions of the specifications."

"How can I?" I asked. "Those patents will only describe diving suits that go underwater. They won't—"

He cut me off with an airy wave of his hand. "Whenever you hit the word 'underwater,' change it to 'underground.' When you hit the word 'sea,' change it to 'ground' or 'earth.' You'll save a lot of time that way. Okay, you're on your own. But let me see the spec before you file it."

I left and went over to the Patent Office to make the search. I flipped through the patents in Class 2, Subclass 2.1, and selected two patents to serve as models. I realized almost immediately that I'd be able to use large portions of them. It seemed like a good idea at the time.

During the next ten days I wrote and re-wrote. I consulted with Marchare on several occasions, and I worked closely with Eskew to make sure that his drawings would be comprehensible to a man from Mars—or a patent examiner. Even at lunch Susan, our secretary, and I talked about the diving suit and hardly anything else. I ate, slept, and breathed the suit. I became convinced that it was going to be a perfect application. The Patent Office wouldn't get to first base with its exotic logic this time.

Susan was a gem. She never even frowned when I changed my mind several times about how best to drive home a telling point. She just tore up the old copy and made a

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new one from my dictation. Sometimes, though, she had a funny little half-smile on her face as though she knew something which I didn't. I asked her about it once. She didn't say a word, just reached over and patted me on top of the head. Somehow it made me feel like a Pekinese. But I refused to let it worry me. I was too busy creating a perfect patent specification.

The opening paragraph in my specification read:

This invention relates to a suit of apparel, particularly designed for the protection of a diver, and has for its object to provide a diving suit of novel construction that may be comfortably worn by a person, be capable of yielding at all the joints of the wearer's body, be earthproof and airtight, be self-contained as to air supply, be light, strong, and durable, afford means for the descent of a diver in various depths of dirt, and enable the deep-ground diver to move around freely through rock, stone, and earth of varying composition.

The final draft consisted of seven pages of drawings, ten pages of spec, and twenty-eight claims. I sat at my desk for a good thirty minutes pridefully staring at the lovely stack of papers. I read over some of the more brilliant passages, rolling the words on my tongue, amazed at what a clear picture they painted. Convinced that it was now a masterpiece of logic and persuasiveness, I took it in for Spardleton's approval.

He picked it up and began to read. I waited confidently, convinced that he could hardly fail to see in it the sure hand of genius.

He finished it far more rapidly than I would have thought possible. *"Um,"* he said, tossing it back to me, "It'll do. File it."

Susan made out a check for thirty-eight dollars and I mailed the whole mess to the Patent Office.

The next couple of months passed swiftly. Under Spardleton's expert tutelage my working fund of patent knowledge blossomed and grew. I learned how to write page after page of patent specification without actually saying anything. I achieved an amazing degree of tonal control over my voice. By simply saying to an Examiner, "I don't quite agree with you there," I was able to suggest by the tone of my voice alone that I knew he had received his scientific education by the rudimentary osmotic process of sitting on his text books. Sometimes it worked.

Then one day Spardleton sent for me.

He was evidently busy trying to decipher an Office Action when I entered. Webster's Unabridged stood open on its stand beside his desk and at least six volumes of the Britannica were scattered about on the floor. The desk itself was littered with thesauruses and handbooks and I noticed particularly

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Partridge's *Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English.*

As soon as I walked in he asked, "Did you ever hear of the word 'sludutiferous?' "

"I'm afraid not," I said.

"Well, there *is* such a word. I found it here." He waved vaguely at the forest of books on his desk. "And I must say I'm a little disappointed in the Examiner. I don't know what the Patent Office is coming to when they begin using words that are actually in existence." He looked at the initials in the upper left-hand corner of the Office Action. "Oh," he said, brightening considerably. "Maybe that explains it. Old Nailgood. He's just allowed several claims in Marchare's cabbagite deodorizer case. He must be slipping fast."

His smile vanished and his brows drew together. "Still, there's something phony here. Cabbagite is a real invention. It's a money maker for Marchare, and a boon to the housewife. There's something remotely similar in the prior art. It's very odd, therefore, that the office is willing to give us a patent on it. Unless—"

"Unless what?"

"Unless they want to allow it, in order to use the allowed claims to reject Marchare on some other application of even greater importance. Does he have any co-pending applications relating to cabbagite?"

"None that I know of," I said. "How about that diving suit?"

I stared at him, startled. "Surely you don't mean they'd reject a diving suit on a deodorizer? What kind of sanity is that?"

He gave me a puzzled look. "Sanity? What's sanity got to do with it?"

I hadn't got around to answering him when Susan walked in and handed Spardleton a letter—clearly a communication from an Examiner. He tore it open and scanned it quickly.

"Ah, hah," he said. "Look here. This explains everything."

I circled around behind him. It was an Office Action, all right. And it was in reference to the diving suit application.

The first thing I noticed were the initials in the upper left-hand corner: H. K. *Herbert Krome!* Mister Patent Office himself—the evil genius who handled patent lawyers the way an animal trainer handles big cats. A single glance showed me how serious—and nasty—it was.

"This application has been examined

Art cited:

Anderson et al—

1,022,997 April 9, 1912 2/2.1

Browne—

2,388,674 Nov. 13, 1945 2/2.1

Claims 1-28 are rejected as based on inoperable structure in the absence of a demonstration.

Claims 1-28 are further rejected on the allowed claims in applicant's co-pending S.N. 162,465, directed to the cabbagite crystal. Since it is known that cabbagite

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rearranges matter ($30_2 \rightarrow 20_3$) it would be obvious to attach it to the well-known diving suit of Browne to obtain applicant's result.

No claim is allowed.

Examiner.

"See?" said Spardleton, his features dark. "Just as I thought. *He's using our own application against us.*"

We were quiet for a moment.

"There's another matter," said Spardleton. "Marchare says the Department of Defense has been dickering with him for rights under his diving suit application. I told him to stall them until he gets an allowance. If he can't get a patent, the government can award manufacturing rights to anyone and not have to pay Marchare a nickel.

"Actually, they prefer a license under a patent. It avoids any chance of suits in the U. S. Court of Claims by twenty or more half-baked inventors who think Defense stole the idea from them. So time is of the essence."

I said, "If I could demonstrate a suit to Krome, I'm sure he'd allow the case immediately. But I don't think the suit has been completed yet. Have you heard from Marchare?"

"I phoned him about it a couple of weeks ago," said Spardleton. "He told me it wasn't *quite* ready. When I asked him to be specific he mumbled something about bugs in the control system." Spardleton studied me thoughtfully.

"I can at least *show* the suit to Krome," I said uneasily.

"I think it'll take more than that," Spardleton said.

"Maybe I could fill it with rocks and let it down into the ground on a rope," I suggested brightly.

"Krome won't buy that." Spardleton frowned and seemed lost in thought for a moment. "Still, if I know Krome as well as I think I do it may work out all right. You'd better arrange for an interview this afternoon, and then run out and get the suit—*as is.* Marchare said you could have it anytime."

As I left to take care of things, a slow introspective smile was spreading over Spardleton's face.

Each patent lawyer must develop his own technique for interviewing Examiners. Some shout and rave and rant. But that is foolhardy. One slip, and the show is over. Others play dumb and act as if they haven't the slightest idea what the score is. That encourages the Examiner to talk himself out on a limb. Still others employ the yakety-yak system wherein they never give the Examiner a chance to open his mouth. It is a subterfuge which is only used by those who don't dare meet the Examiner in fair and open combat. Others use the buddy-to-buddy approach in which the attorney manages to convince the Examiner that he and the Examiner—and especially the Examiner—are the only two people in the whole world who really understand patents.

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After due consideration I had decided to use an absolutely unique approach, one never thought of before.

I was going to be myself.

I had a good invention, the application was well-written and everything was just as it should be. I had no need to resort to deception, or evasion. Besides, I had seen what Krome could do to attorneys with a system. He took the system, rolled it up in a compact ball, and fanned them out with it, scoring his three strikes without once unbending.

At two o'clock sharp, with the diving suit under my arm, I stepped up to Mr. Krome's desk.

"Mr. Krome?" I inquired, with just the proper amount of rhetorical deference.

"Yes, yes. What is it?" he said without even looking up.

"I'd like to talk to you, sir, if I may. It's about the Marchare case, the diving suit—"

I knew Krome quite well, but still he asked me coldly, "Are you the attorney of record?"

"Yes, sir," was my instant reply. He knew I was—and he knew I knew that he knew. But it was part of his routine, and I didn't want to irritate him by abbreviating the amenities."

"I can spare you ten minutes," he grumbled. "I have an important appointment with the Commissioner at two-thirty."

I said, "Ten minutes will be quite sufficient."

"Just a second while I get the case," he said. He got up and disappeared into the Clerk's room.

Five minutes later he returned, and steamed back to his desk, my application clutched tightly in his hand.

"Yes," he said, without even looking at it, "part of my rejection was on probable inoperability. Have you got a working model there?"

"I certainly have," I replied. "Thought you might not believe it even when you see it. This is absolutely the most—"

"Why won't I believe it when I see it?" he demanded.

"Well, I just meant—"

"Is this a trick of some kind?" he bridled.

"No. Oh, no. I just—"

"Well, why won't I believe it when I see it?"

"I didn't mean it that way," I said quickly. "I meant—"

"I heard what you said. Let me remind you of Rule Three. Interviews with Examiners must be conducted with decorum. No frivolity, understand?"

"I'm sorry," I apologized. "You'll believe it. Honest you will."

He stared at me suspiciously. "We'll see. Bring it into the next room." He stalked off.

I picked up the box, and staggered after him into the conference room.

"Open it up," he commanded.

I dumped the suit on the table.

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He felt the texture of the cloth. "It doesn't look like much," he said. "And look here." Very deliberately he stretched the diving suit out full length. "Doesn't that look just like an ordinary diving suit?" he asked.

"Yes, but—"

"Isn't its design similar to that of any diving suit?"

"Yes, but—"

"And a diver underground acts the same as a diver underwater."

"Well, sure. But—"

"And, as a matter of fact, listen to this." Krome picked up the application and read a few paragraphs to me. "Now," he said, "all I have to do is change the word 'underground' to 'underwater,' change the word 'ground' or 'earth' to 'sea,' and I have a perfect description of a deepsea diving suit. Am I right?"

"I know all that," I said. "But—"

"Well, then—there is no invention here. Once the cabbagite crystal is known it becomes so obvious that any routineer could use it in a diving suit. A new use of an old thing or an old process cannot be patented. Regar & Sons, Incorporated versus Scott and Williams, Incorporated."

I protested, "But wait a minute. Wait until I demonstrate it for you. I'll tie this rope on and then—"

"No you don't," he said. "You don't pull any rope tricks on me. I've read the spec. I know how it's *supposed* to work. *I'll* put it on." And he began to climb into it.

"Kindly stop opening and closing your mouth," he said, "and help me with the helmet."

"Please," I gasped. "The controls aren't—"

"Put the helmet on," he said.

"But the controls aren't—"

"Put the helmet on," he insisted.

With nerveless fingers I obeyed. I can remember wondering whether there was anything in his life insurance policy that would have covered a possibly fatal outcome. I hoped they wouldn't make his widow and children wait seven years.

I turned to glance at the door to see if there were any witnesses. No one was watching. I turned back to Krome and noticed with alarm that he appeared to have grown shorter. For a moment I thought he had fallen to his knees. But then I saw that he was slowly sinking through the floor.

I made gestures with my hands in front of his face plate in a frantic attempt to show him how to operate the controls. Lower and lower he sank. I followed him right down to the floor until he disappeared through it, leaving me on my hands and knees staring at the blank and dusty tiles.

Then I realized with horror that we were on the seventh floor.

I turned and rushed out of the room and down the hall to the stairway. I tore down the stairs, and out into the hall below. I ran

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for the room directly underneath the one where Krome had been. Before I could reach it several sickeningly-curdled screams resounded through the corridor, and I heard the muffled bangs of things crashing to the floor. A few loose papers floated out through the open door.

I pulled up in the doorway, and looked in.

There were five patent attorneys in the room, waiting their turn to be heard by the Board of Appeals. Krome was in the middle of the room up to his waist in the floor. His arms flailed wildly as he tried to keep his balance.

The panic-stricken attorneys stood on tables and chairs hurling whatever they could lay their hands on at the monster that confronted them. Books, inkwells, and brief cases rained around Krome's helmeted figure. Finally one of the attorneys reached down and hoisted a chair high over his head.

Krome saw it and raised an arm in terrified protest. For the first time his voice came out through the speaker attached to the diving suit. "No! No!" he screamed. But it did no good. With fear-driven muscles the attorney launched the chair at Krome. It struck him sharply across the chest.

The two shattered ends of the chair hurtled past him, and crashed against the opposite wall. The middle portion that had hit his body flattened out like water against the suit. Part of it flowed down, and formed wooden puddles on the floor. Other parts splashed out sideways in little streamlets that solidified into splinters and sprinkled all over the floor.

The attorneys stared bug-eyed at what had happened to the chair. For a brief instant they were paralyzed. Then, moving as a single man, all five of them made a dive for the doorway. I was directly in their path, and I never had a chance.

I was a wreck when the stampede had passed over me. My nose was bleeding profusely, my left trouser-leg was ripped off at the knee, and my right sleeve was gone. There were even footprints on my naked chest.

I crawled back to the door and looked in. Krome was gone. I got to my feet and slowly started to walk toward the stairs. I tried in vain to stem the flow of blood with my shirttail. One eye was swelling fast, and a front tooth had worked loose.

I wandered out into the next lower corridor in search of Krome. I looked in at the doorway of what seemed to be the proper room. It was. The Primary Examiner was sitting at his desk talking to an ashen-faced young fellow. Neither of them was saying anything. Their eyes were fixed on a stationary point at one corner of the Primary's desk. At first I couldn't tell what it was. Then I caught a movement, and my heart sank.

Krome had descended on the Primary's desk. Apparently he had

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thrashed around while trying to get his balance, and now he was half-stuck in the desk. I got there just in time to see the helmet, right side up at last, take up a fixed position at one end of a shelf of books.

"Oh," said the Primary peering in through the faceplate. "I'm glad you dropped in, Krome. I'd like you to meet Jones, our newest junior Examiner. He just joined us today. Mr. Jones, Mr. Krome." There was a bitter, almost savage irony in his voice.

Krome nodded curtly, only his head visible above the desk top. His arm came out of the desk as he started to shake hands. But he thought better of it and his arm dropped out of sight again. Jones just sat there, white, tense.

The Primary nodded. "Some misguided applicant has just cut his own throat by persuading Mr. Krome to try out his invention." He turned to Jones. "There's a good lesson here. The inventor has merely substituted stone for water. In processes it's a common expedient to substitute one ordinary medium for another. Diving suits are no exception. Mere gadgeteering."

Jones just sat there staring at Krome's head. I don't think he heard anything the Primary said. I could see that if anybody was going to defend my application, I'd have to do it myself. I walked into the room and took up the battle.

"But how," I demanded, "can you reject an inventor on his own co-pending application—one that hasn't even been issued as a patent?"

Krome gave me a pained look through the quartz porthole. "Section one hundred and two, A, says the invention must not have been known before the invention by the applicant. There's no inventive advance in the diving suit over Marchare's prior cabbagite application. Hence, in effect, the diving suit invention was known when Marchare invented cabbagite."

I blinked at his steady black eyes. "You mean," I said, "like jet planes were known when the Chinese invented the sky rocket?"

"Precisely. This concept of patent law is so sound, so logical, that I can't understand why the Supreme Court took nearly a hundred and fifty years to swing around to it. And, of course, when it's the inventor's own prior work that's used to reject a current application, the situation is a double strike against him." He leered at me triumphantly. "How can a man be smarter than himself?"

"But even the Supreme Court says you can't reject an application on a combination merely because you can find all its elements in the prior art," I protested. "There can still be a patentable invention in combining those elements. Here the invention consists of combining cabbagite *and* a diving suit. Nobody ever thought of that before."

"Of course they never thought of it before," he explained patient-

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ly. "They couldn't, because they never heard of cabbagite before."

"Then nobody but Marchare could invent the diving suit."

"Quite true. But the minute he invented it, it became non-invention, because, since it was *he* who invented it, it didn't require invention."

The new Examiner finally recovered his faculties. He slapped both hands on his knees, got up, and said, "Well, so long, sir. By resigning right now I may have a fighting chance of retaining my sanity." And he walked out the side door shaking his head.

"What's the matter with him?" asked the Primary in a puzzled voice.

Krome said, "I don't know. Perhaps he—" He stopped. The helmet had suddenly dropped a couple of inches further into the desk. It hung there a split second, then dropped a few inches more. Step by step he was slipping down. We heard his muffled voice coming out of the desk through the cracks around the drawers, but we couldn't understand what he said. The Primary and I leaned over to look under the desk. We watched the floor close over the helmet.

The Primary straightened up, and glared at me. "Well," he said. "If you'll excuse me, I have lots of work to do."

"Oh, sure," I said. "I have to go find Mr. Krome anyway. Goodbye, and thanks for your trouble."

"No trouble, no trouble," he retorted with a venomous inflection, picking up a document from his desk top and beginning to read it.

I trotted on down to the room underneath.

The door was closed, and on it in big letters were the words NARCOTICS BUREAU. I carefully opened the door and looked inside.

It was a small room, and there were only four men in it. Three of them were bent intently over their desks. But the fourth man had tilted back in his chair for a moment's reflection and contemplation. His hands were clasped behind his head, and everything about him was normal—except his eyes. No human eyes should ever protrude the way his did.

Krome hung suspended from the ceiling. Everything below his collar bone was in plain sight, and most of it was thrashing around noiselessly. For about ten seconds it continued thus—the immobile narcotics expert, the quivering Krome. Then Krome managed to turn on the energy field in the upper part of the suit. Without a sound he slipped out of the ceiling, fell through the floor, and disappeared.

Nobody saw him go except me and the thinker. That amazing gentleman swallowed hard and sat upright. A quick glance convinced him that none of the others had noticed anything wrong. He swallowed again, sighed heavily, and

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then methodically began to clean out his desk.

As I was sadly closing the door, I realized with sudden consternation that Krome was dropping toward the Search Room on the ground floor. And the ceiling there was over twenty feet high. I began to run again.

The Search Room was quiet when I burst into it, holding my tattered and blood-caked clothing tightly around me. The occupants of the room gave me strange looks, but they were so used to having screwballs around that nobody said anything. I kept my eyes on the ceiling.

For a moment there was no sign of Krome. Then off to one side, over near the entrance where the patent bundles were kept, a foot appeared from the ceiling. It moved around as if seeking a firm place to stand, and then quickly withdrew back into the ceiling. It cautiously reappeared a moment later, closer to the huge pillars that stretched down to the floor. Again it sought a footing.

I heaved a sigh of relief. Krome evidently knew where he was, and was taking no chances. As I stared the foot vanished for the second time.

It came into view again an instant later, this time about eighteen inches from the arch at the summit of the pillars. It flitted around and found the pillar. Hands flashed through the ceiling as Krome paddled himself over, and then carefully lowered himself out of the ceiling and into the arch at the top. Large portions of him were now in plain view.

The uproar from the floors above had been steadily increasing in volume. The people in the Search Room were glancing questioningly at one another. And just as Krome was about to complete his transfer to the pillar one of the patent stenographers saw him.

Her screams all but shattered every window in the block-long room. Everybody froze. All eyes followed the stenographer's hand that was pointing to where Krome was just beginning to descend, half in and half out of the pillar. A long moment of stark silence gave a kind of funeral dirge significance to what followed.

There were only two exits. I was smart this time. I stood off to one side as the terrified occupants of the room leaped over the search tables like gazelles fleeing from a lion. Chairs were crushed to pulpwood. Many people had been back in the stacks when the commotion started, and were now emerging with their arms loaded with bundles of patents. Instantly the air was thick with flying documents.

I couldn't help but admire the consummate skill with which Krome descended the column. His rear end protruded as he stepped slowly down. Every four or five feet, he'd stop, turn around, and thrust his head out to make sure where he was. Then he'd disappear for a

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moment, out would come his backside again, and the slow descent would resume.

There was a revolving fan fastened to the pillar about seven feet above the floor. I watched, fascinated, as Krome got closer and closer to it. Finally fan and fanny met. The blades flowed into long slivers of metal that shot across the room and *spanged* off the walls. The motor, relieved of its load, began to race faster and faster.

Krome must have felt the gentle blows of the blades because his hand reached out of the pillar and brushed at them as though he were shooing a fly. His hand passed through the fan support. There was a shower of sparks and a little smoke curled up. The fan sagged forward on its support and then solidified as Krome's hand moved on through. I never saw a sorrier looking device than that fan once Krome got through with it. The electricians would be in for a bad few hours trying to figure out what had happened to it.

Krome finally reached the floor, stepped out of the pillar, turned off the suit, and heaved a big sigh. He turned around and for the first time got a good look at the Search Room. Most of the chairs were reduced to rubble. Many of the large search tables were overturned and broken and Krome himself stood knee-deep in patents.

Krome gave one puzzled and uncomprehending glance at all this. Then he looked at the clock over the door. "Good grief!" he groaned. "Two thirty-five! The Commissioner!" He turned and ran through one of the archways that opened into the stacks. I lit out after him.

He had turned the suit on again, except for the soles of the feet. This gave him a decided advantage over me. He could take short cuts through solid walls. He went through the back wall of the stacks without even slowing down.

I cut off to one side through the door that led into the foreign art. I stopped and listened. From the other end of the long law room I heard a sudden splintering crash. I raced on in trepidation. A man was standing near the Swedish art. A broken pint bottle lay at his feet and whiskey was lapping at the soles of his shoes. His forefinger was half-crooked in front of his face. But it was his bulging eyes, aimed at a section of the wall, which pointed out the direction Krome had taken. As I turned from him he collapsed, head in hands, and began to sob quietly.

I quickly found my way to the back corridor. As I proceeded down it, the now-familiar ruckus started up in the Mail Room. Women screamed, men shouted, and heavy objects thumped on the floor. Krome had used very poor judgment in cutting through the Mail Room. But how was he to know that the people in it were not scientifically-minded?

I waited until one of the doors

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stopped spewing people, and then leaped resolutely inside. One glance convinced me that the Patent Office would not be running smoothly for a considerable period to come. Several of the clerks had dropped to their knees and were praying, some quietly, some loudly.

There were papers everywhere. And an empty mailbag dangled limply from an overhead light, looking startlingly like the victim of an over-wrought hangman. One man sat on the floor in front of a pile of thousands of newly-arrived applications. He was laughing insanely and tossing repeated handfuls of applications high overhead. Petitions, checks, notarized oaths, drawings, and fragments of applications slithered through the air like snowflakes in a blizzard. Krome had passed through, all right.

I walked amidst the bedlam unnoticed seeking some sign of Krome. I couldn't figure out where he had gone. Then suddenly I had it—his two-thirty appointment with the Commissioner.

I jumped to a window and looked out. My heart almost stopped beating at what I saw.

A girl was walking away from me along the sidewalk, her hips swinging up and down like the ends of a seesaw. Krome was plowing along right behind her, completely out of control, getting closer all the time. He was tilted forward pawing at the ground with his hands, now submerged to his neck, now above ground to his ankles. The girl had ignored his first frantic warnings, so Krome shouted again. She threw an annoyed glance back over one shoulder and—the seesaw froze.

Krome churned closer and closer. My heart was in my mouth. I had no idea what would happen when the diving suit bumped into a live human being. I stopped breathing.

Closer and closer! Then just as a collision seemed inevitable Krome executed a rather neat surface dive into the pavement which carried him safely and spectacularly underneath her feet. Almost instantly he reappeared on the other side doing a strong overhand stroke which quickly put a safe distance between himself and the grievously threatened young lady. She toppled over in a dead faint.

I dashed into the next building, into an office where a short, heavy-set man stood bending over a huge desk. I recognized him in a flash. The Commissioner of Patents!

At the Commissioner's desk side sat a man in uniform—a two-star general.

It added up. I thought fast. Krome — the Commissioner — the general.

I cleared my throat as they lookd up blankly. "I beg your pardon," I said politely. "I'm Mr. Saddle, Dr. Marchare's attorney in the diving suit case. Mr. Krome suggested I be here during his appointment on this matter."

"Really?" grunted the Commis-

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sioner. "And where is Mr. Krome?"

"He said he'd be passing through any moment now," I said hurriedly.

Just then Krome walked in through the north wall. Fortunately neither the general nor the Commissioner saw him until he stepped out from the wall.

The Commissioner glared at Krome, then at his desk clock. "You're late," he chided. "However, since you brought the suit, that'll save time. Gentlemen, this is General Bond, Secret Weapons Bureau, Department of Defense."

Krome got it immediately too. But, like other people who live by their wits, my reflexes were faster. I said smoothly, "Mr. Krome and I have just been giving the suit a tryout, and he invited me along to the conference." I beamed sideways at Krome. "He finds all the claims allowable, and my client stands prepared to license the Secretary of Defense to manufacture, at a very reasonable royalty, any and all—"

"But—" sputtered Krome.

"Mr. Krome has applied to most stringent tests." I continued hurriedly as I sidled over toward the encased, protesting figure. And in patting him jovially on the back, I somehow brushed against the mike button, chopping off the torrent in mid-cascade. "Oops, how careless of me! Oh, well, Mr. Krome will tell you himself, as soon as I get the helmet off."

"How long will that take?" demanded General Bond.

"Not more than three or four hours," I said. "If it doesn't jam."

"Can't wait." He turned curtly to the Commissioner. "Phone me the patent number as soon as the application is passed to issue."

"Yes, sir," the Commissioner replied.

"And you, Mr. Saddle," said the general sternly, "had better inform Dr. Marchare about the penalties of profiteering against his government. We'll give him a trial order for ten thousand suits, but if he holds out for more than five thousand dollars per suit, we'll seize the patent by Eminent Domain."

"I suppose the good doctor won't mind taking a loss on a small trial order," I said reluctantly. "But, of course, on a mass scale, my client would at least have to make expenses, particularly if he adds certain improved features."

"Hey, wait a minute," declared the Commissioner. "There's something funny about this. Look at Krome. Tears are pouring down his cheeks!"

"I'm sure that's sweat." I mopped my face hurriedly. "It's warm in here too, isn't it? Dr. Marchare intends to air-condition the suit. That'll bring it up to an even six thousand."

"Five thousand five hundred," clipped the general.

I hesitated a moment. "You're a hard man, general," I sighed. "But —all right, five thousand five hundred it is."

And I led Krome out of the room.

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the elephant hound

by . . . Charles W. Price, Jr.

He was just a big ugly old dog with floppy ears. But to K. Ross Bredd he was lightning on wheels and possibly–the Devil's Advocate.

THE AFTERNOON that fellow came along and told us this crazy yarn about Old Liver-Lips, the Elepant Hound, we were all sitting on the verandah of Dave's store down at the intersection of Highway 51 and the Cool Creek road. We were petting a Beagle pup that Bob Pearce had brought along and talking about bird dogs, rabbit dogs, coon dogs, hog dogs and other kinds of dogs and telling dog stories.

We had been at it about an hour when the biggest, ugliest, oddest-looking dog you ever saw came down the highway, loping along, easy but fast, and turned off toward Dave's store.

I thought I had seen just about every kind of dog, but I'd never set eyes on a dog like that before unless it was the night I ate too much barbecued goat at the Billy Wilson's anniversary celebration and woke up hollering at two in the morning.

That dog was as big as a calf. Its paws were the size of your fist and a little puff of dust flew up every time they hit the ground. Its hair was bristly and iron gray, only it

You're familiar with Paul Bunyan, of course, that great roistering giant of a lumberman who could chop down trees a thousand feet in height and use them as toothpicks. Well, Paul Bunyan is a golden myth and an American folk hero, to be sure. But for a myth that isn't at all, that is as real as yesterday's tomorrow and golden to boot, more humorous than any Bunyan yarn could possibly be, we recommend this astounding fantasy by a fiction writer of considerable renown. You won't ever forget Charles W. Price Jr.'s liver-lipped hound.

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was bluish in spots. And there were some brown spots, some yellow spots, several red spots, and a big black spot around each eye.

This dog was bony and gaunt but strong-looking, like those fellows that run a mile at the track meet. It had big, floppy ears the general size and shape of a pot lid; sagging jowls; droopy, liver-colored lips, and a mournful, respectful no-nonsense expression on its face, like a bloodhound.

But the most remarkable thing about this dog was its nose. As it came closer, we could see that it actually had a proboscis about an inch long, as if it had started to grow a trunk like an elephant and had then changed its mind. As it loped along, its head close to the ground, this remarkable nose twitched and vibrated so fast you could almost hear it hum.

I thought for a minute the heat had me, but the other fellows saw the same thing. Bob Pearce turned a little pale and picked up his Beagle pup and stood on the bench.

But the big dog never paid us any mind. It loped over to the gas pump and sniffed around for a second. Then it ran up the steps, across the verandah and into the store and stopped a moment at the candy counter, the ice cream box and the tobacco counter. Then it ran out to the gas pump again, ran back up the steps and sniffed at the spot where the Beagle pup had been lying. Finally it made another trip to the pump, and ran under the verandah.

"Well for Pete's sake!" I said. "Who do you think that critter was trailing?"

"I can't imagine," said Dave, who had come to the door. "But it must have been somebody who stopped to buy some gas and immediately afterwards went in and got some ice cream, some candy and some tobacco."

Then he must have come back out on the verandah," added Al Short, "stopped to pat that Beagle pup on the head, and made a couple of trips out to the gas pump."

"But that's impossible," put in Bob Pearce. "I never brought this pup down here until about an hour ago. There's been nobody by since but old man Robbins and he didn't get out of his truck. Besides, if whoever it was stopped at the gas pump, it seems like he would have been in a car and that dog couldn't have followed him. At least, I never heard of a dog that could."

"I guess he was just sniffing around," said Dave. "But he looks awful queer and I hope I don't have to get down and chase him out from under there."

But we didn't think any more about it right then, because a car came down the highway and turned off and stopped under the big oak tree by the gas pump, just as the dog had done.

There were a man and a woman in the car. The woman started fixing her face by the rear-view mirror

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while the man got out and told Dave's boy, Jack, to fill the tank and check the oil and the tires. Then he went in the store and bought some candy, some ice cream and a handful of cigars. He took the candy and ice cream out to the woman and then came back and stood by the steps to talk and stretch his legs a minute.

He lit a cigar and then reached over on the verandah and patted the Beagle pup on the head. "Fine looking pup you've got there," he said. "Think he'll make a good tracker?"

That's the kind of question Bob Pearce loves.

"The best in the country!" he vowed. "Why, that little old pup's pappy never lost a trail in his life. He could trail anything. One night he went out and trailed a Will-o'-the-Wisp fifteen miles across the swamp and caught it and brought it home in his jaws. I put it in a bird cage and kept it. I use it for a lantern."

"Extraordinary," said the stranger. But somehow his voice sounded like he wasn't really impressed at all.

Bob gave him a sharp look and tried again. "But that's nothing. This little old pup's mammy—I take her fishing with me all the time. She can point a catfish in ten feet of water."

"Hmm-mm," said the stranger.

Bob began to get a little irritated.

"But this little old pup's great-great-great grandpappy!" he went on. "Once he sniffed an old musket ball somebody dug up in the yard and he trailed a company of Yankee soldiers forty miles to the battle of Port Hudson!"

"Pretty good nose for a Beagle," said the stranger.

The rest of us were about to bust. That was all Bob could take. He decided to give the stranger a chance. "Have you ever seen a dog with a better nose?" he asked.

"Yes, I have," the stranger answered matter-of-factly. He was a matter-of-fact looking fellow, about medium height and medium weight, sun-tanned, and a little bald. He was dressed in sport clothes, but not too loud. I did think that I could see little fine worry lines in his face and a nervous look in his eyes but I decided maybe it was just the way his glasses magnified them.

"But I wouldn't want you to think I'm putting down on your Beagles," he continued. "The dog I'm talking about was no ordinary dog. Maybe I'd better introduce myself. I am K. Ross Bredd. My father is Thoreau W. Bredd, the dog fancier. I don't imagine you ever have heard of him, because my father is —or was before he took up another hobby—a dog fancier's dog fancier, and not just the common variety of dog breeder."

Bob, who thinks he grows the best Beagles in America and wants everybody to know it, didn't like that last remark very much. But he was willing to go along with Mr.

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Bredd for a while. "I take it your father raised some pretty fancy dogs," he said.

"Oh, indeed!" said the stranger. "It was my father who developed the original hush puppy."

"But a hush puppy isn't a dog," objected Abner Wheat. "It's a lump of fried cornmeal batter."

"I know that's what you call a hush puppy down here," agreed the stranger, "but the original hush puppy was my father's non-barking dog. Geneticists acclaimed its development as a feat equal to the development of the seedless orange and the skinless frankfurter. And speaking of frankfurters reminds me of another unusual dog bred by my father."

"Not the original hot dog!" exclaimed Bob.

"That's right—the original hot dog. It's body temperature was three hundred and forty degrees. Father had to keep it in an asbestos dog house. It drank only boiling water and ate its food out of a red-hot skillet."

"That's very interesting," said Dave. "But I don't think the hush puppy would be very much good as a watch dog or that the hot dog would make a very good hunting dog. He would always be starting brush fires everywhere he went."

"Quite right," agreed the stranger. "My father could hunt with him only during a heavy rain that would put out fires as fast as he started them. Even then it was difficult because when the rain hit him he gave off a tremendous cloud of steam. A spectacle in any woods, I can assure you. But although my father was a dog fancier's dog fancier and not a common dog breeder, he did take an interest in dogs that were useful as well as ornamental. He developed the greatest tracker that ever lived since the beginning of time, the Liver-Lipped Elephant Hound."

"Well, I've only been to the circus twice in my life," interrupted Abner Wheat, "but from what I've seen of elephants, and the way they smell, it wouldn't take much of a hound to trail an elephant."

"But this dog was so named not because it was used to trail elephants but because of its physical characteristics," the stranger explained. "It could trail anything that ever walked, swam or flew. I once knew it to trail a man that flew over town in an airplane."

At that moment the woman in the car called him and he went out and lit a cigarette for her. When he came back, Dave said, "Mr. Bredd, would you mind telling us just how your father went about developing the Liver-Lipped Elephant Hound?"

Nobody likes a good story better than Dave does. He puts his whole heart into listening and always believes it while it is being told.

"Well," K. Ross Bredd began, "my father raised all kinds of dogs. Once at the International Dog Show he exhibited the grand champion liver-lipped potlickker hound, the grand champion biscuit hound,

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the grand champion fiest and the grand champion flea hound. Many years ago he began to study the characteristics that make certain dogs among these and many other breeds better trackers than other dogs.

"Out of his vast experience, father soon observed a fact that had escaped all other dog breeders from the beginning of time. That fact is this: Although certain breeds appear to make better trackers than other breeds, the truth is that it is not the breed at all that makes a dog a good tracker. It's the length and flexibility of its nose. Among all breeds, the best at following a trail are those individuals whose noses are the longest and vibrate the most rapidly.

"The difference might be only a centimeter or less, but it is always there. If you will take a good look at your own dogs and talk to your friends who own hunting dogs, you will find this to be invariably true. So from his immense collection of dogs, father began selecting animals with this characteristic, regardless of breed. Finally, after twenty years, he produced the Liver-Lipped Elephant Hound, the greatest tracker that ever lived."

"It's mighty funny none of us ever heard of the Elephant Hound," Bob Pearce said.

"It isn't so very funny," the stranger replied. "The distemper was going the rounds of my father's kennels at the time. Both the parents died and only one of the litter survived — the only Liver-Lipped Elephant Hound that ever existed."

"But if they're so good," Dave objected, "I don't see why your father didn't go ahead and raise a lot of them."

"It's this way," the stranger answered. "The Liver-Lipped Elephant Hound was not a mongrel or a mere crossbreed. It was a true hybrid dog and could not reproduce itself. You know how it is with hybrid corn. You have to buy hybrid seed every year. You can't save your corn and plant it, because it is likely to revert back and show all sorts of characteristics from the parent stock. It was the same way with the Elephant Hound.

"Father tried breeding the Elephant Hound to a female from the previous litter that had all the other characteristics excepting the keen nose of the true Elephant Hound. But the true Elephant Hound, at the peak of its development, could not reproduce itself. The pups reverted back, away back. The litter included a Russian wolf-hound, a Beagle, an Airdale, a Great Dane and a Pekinese.

"It was a nuisance as well as a disappointment. Father used to get in a fist fight every time he tried to convince anyone that they all belonged to the same litter. If he hadn't been six feet four inches tall and weighed two hundred and forty pounds, all muscle, nobody ever would have believed him.

"But it was a great shock to father. After twenty years, he had only

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one Elephant Hound, and it couldn't reproduce itself. And about that time the hot dog got loose and burned down half the kennels and the office. All the records were destroyed and my father knew that it might take him another twenty years, forty years, or forever to reproduce the true Elephant Hound. He gave the Elephant Hound to me, sold all his other dogs and, for a hobby, began crossing guppies with parakeets to produce a flying fish that could talk. He thought they would make wonderful pets.

"But, to get on with my story. I was tickled pink to own this wonderful dog, the only one of its kind in the world, with the keenest nose of any dog that ever lived—and the longest. First thing, I took him on a hike through the woods. Like most dogs, he ran ahead of me. But he was different. He ran straight ahead and always took every turn just before I took it.

"I decided I was following a natural path and he was trailing someone who had been that way recently. He led me to a neighboring farm where a new family had moved in the day before. The farmer had four beautiful daughters. Three weeks later I married the youngest —my wife."

He nodded toward the car.

"We took the Elephant Hound everywhere we went," he continued. "I thought it brought me luck. My wife didn't take to the animal and mumbled something about it being too smart for its own good. But I thought that was just a woman's whim, until things began to happen that made me a little uneasy. The animal accompanied me everywhere, but it never trotted at my heels like other dogs do. It always trotted along about two yards ahead of me, its nose to the ground. I simply could not understand how it was able to anticipate every turn that I made and always arrive wherever I was going about six feet ahead of me without ever so much as looking back.

"A small matter, you may say, but it began to weigh on my mind. I will not bore you with all the stratagems I attempted in a vain effort to lose the Elephant Hound or elude it for even a moment. Suffice it to say I shall never forget the day our first child was born. I rushed my wife to the hospital, leaving the Elephant Hound behind. But when I got to the hospital it was sitting there at the ambulance entrance, wagging its tail. It had taken a short cut across the fields, through the railroad yards and into town.

"The sight of it infuriated me. I kicked at it, but it dodged around the corner. The next day, when I went to buy some cigars, it was waiting in front of the tobacco store. I kicked at it again and it ran behind some parked cars. When I went down to the barber shop to hand out some cigars to the boys, it was waiting by the barber pole. I gave up and walked home, feeling very gloomy, with the Elephant

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Hound trotting two yards ahead of me.

"Is it possible, I asked myself, that this dog's nose is so keen it can trail me where I'm going instead of where I have been?"

"A ridiculous idea if I ever heard one!" exclaimed Bob Pearce.

"Isn't it, though?" agreed the stranger. "But thinking how ridiculous it was didn't ease my mind a bit, with the Elephant Hound trotting along six feet ahead of me all the time. It was my wife who put into words what I was thinking.

" 'Are you following that dog,' she asked one day, " 'or is it following you? Who's leading who around here, anyway?'

"It was an unanswerable question. It was ridiculous to suggest that I was following the dog. Yet, it always got there first. I began to brood about it. Everything came to a head while we were on vacation out West. I went for a stroll, the Elephant Hound trotting ahead of me. We climbed a small mountain and finally came to the edge of a cliff that overhung a canyon with a river at the bottom, hundreds of feet below. The Elephant Hound trotted to the edge of the precipice, lifted its head, and gave the longest, most mournful howl that I ever had heard.

"My blood ran cold. This is the end! I thought. Here's where I walk to the edge of that precipice and fall into the river. My heart was like lead. I thought of my wife and children, waiting at the camp to which I never would return alive. Tears started into my eyes. Then inspiration struck me. I hurled myself at the dog, with a desperate leap, and pushed him over the edge of the precipice!

"I strolled back to camp, whistling and feeling lighter of heart than I had felt for years.

"The Elephant Hound was waiting for me, dripping water and wagging his tail.

"He had howled not because I was going to fall into the river, but because I was going to push him in! I was in despair. I thought of going back and jumping off myself, just to prove him wrong. I thought of shooting him, but realized that that would be a confession I was losing my mind. And I remembered the twenty years my father had spent breeding this frightful animal, the only one of its kind in the world.

"After we got home, another thought occurred to me. If I could not get ahead of him and lose him that way, maybe I could lose him by making him get so far ahead of me that I never would see him again. I would get rid of him that way. About every ten steps, as we walked down the street, I would take a long step and give him a good kick. He would howl and trot a few yards ahead until I caught up and kicked him again. The neighbors had me in court, but I paid my fine and went about my business of kicking the Elephant Hound.

"He caught on and began to stay about thirty feet ahead of me. I was

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making progress. I bought a powerful air gun and about every ten steps I would let him have a pellet where it did the most good. He'd howl and run ten blocks. After three days of that, he got the idea. I let him have about six shot in rapid succession and he vanished in the distance. That was several years ago.

"I never saw him again. At last I was free! You have no idea what a relief it was to me to know that I did not have to go through life two paces behind that infernal, hideous beast with its incredible nose! You've no remotest idea!"

We all sat silent for a while, just looking at one another. Then Dave spoke: "By the way, Mr. Bredd, just what did that Elephant Hound look like?"

The stranger hesitated a minute and looked at us very closely. "Well, he was a great big old liver-lipped hound, about as big as a calf and bony looking. He had short gray hair with blue spots, brown spots and red spots and a black spot over each eye. His nose was nearly an inch longer than any other dog's nose."

While he was describing the dog he turned a little pale and beads of perspiration popped out all over his face, his neck, his arms and the back of his hands. He looked all around, moving his eyes but not his head.

"Why!" gasped Bob Pearce. "Why, it's under the—" And he clapped his hand over his mouth. The idea was too ridiculous.

"What's that?" demanded the stranger, in a high, sharp voice.

"It's under—it's the strangest dog under the sun!" cried Bob.

The stranger said not another word. He covered the distance to his car in three steps, slammed the door, and shot away with the rear wheels spinning.

"That's it!" said Bob at last. "It's under the verandah right now! Let's catch it! I don't care how that fellow feels about it! I sure would like to own that dog!"

All together, we jumped off the verandah. But the moment our feet hit the ground, a gray streak shot out from under the store, knocked Dave flat in his back, split the dust across the Cool Creek road, and arched over the fence into the woods. The rest of us just stood there looking foolish.

"I wonder where he's headed," said Abner Wheat.

"I don't know," answered Bob. "But if he goes right through the swamp, he'll be in the next town before that fellow in the car is."

Dave got up and dusted himself. "Oh, that's a lot of foolishness, the story that fellow told," he grumbled. "All I wanted to do was get that big ugly dog out from under my store. I don't like stray dogs."

"That's right," agreed Bob. "He might have died there and you'd have had to go under there and drag him out. I'm glad we chased him off."

But he and Dave stood there about ten minutes, watching the

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woods where the big old ugly dog had disappeared.

We never saw Mr. K. Ross Bredd again or the old Liver-Lipped Elephant Hound, either. But we think of them often. I guess that story about the dog whose nose was so sharp it could trail a man where he was going instead of where he had been was about the tallest yarn I ever heard.

Isn't that what you think?

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universe in books

by...Hans Stefan Santesson

The former editor of a famous book club conducts a lively survey of science fiction in hard covers.

A HUNDRED and sixty years ago, young Jesse Appleton was writing to his cousin in Keene, N. H.:

"In little more than a fortnight I am to leave College, and launch out into a world as ignorant for the most part as myself. But what shall I do? Shall I attempt to get my living at the Bar (as a lawyer) already crowded with wise men and fools? Or shall three or four years of my time be spent in the study of physics (truly a laudable study) and then be denied an opportunity of exercising my skill? Or shall I rather join brother Wooley, alias Wooleye, and dispense the everlasting gospel? Which of these will be my favorite is uncertain . . ."

Ambitious, truly, was Jesse Appleton, writing at a time when the "eastern and southern mail are brought here weekly, the former on horseback, the latter in the stage." I quote him in the hope of reassuring those of you who may have felt that August, 1792, was a long, long time ago, and that somehow people were different in those days. Of course it was a long time ago, and still it isn't—measuring time in the terms with which we are familiar. But it

Few critics of science fiction and science fantasy have a keener appreciation of the newer trends in the field than Hans Stefan Santesson. Last month we had the privilege of welcoming him for the first time to our pages with a column which becomes, with this issue, a regular monthly feature. Mr. Santesson knows what he likes, and draws no punches. We think you'll agree that he has come up with a most entertaining, and engagingly special tour of the Pleiades.

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is important to remember that those men and those women who lived and dreamed to make something of the group of scattered and barely united colonies that were to become the United States were very much like you who read this magazine today.

These men and women were often patriots, and equally as often scoundrels. They were men and women with the emotions and impulses of flesh-and-blood people, and any novel or any history that does not get this across, or which describes them simply as noble selfless posturing characters (never chasing a blonde of course!) completely fails to bring those times to life!

But what does all this have to do with Science Fiction?

Plenty.

Science fiction demands something more of its readers than a blind belief in the eventual triumph of unfettered gadgetry, and demands more than the glib certainty that we will go off, a million or a thousand or ten years from now, on sometimes rather badly pre-fabricated and unconvincing tangents —socio-political and well-meaning. Some writers, ignoring the lessons of the past hundred and sixty years and fascinated by machines—without necessarily understanding them —have also assumed that we will mature, machine-wise, but remain the same "characters" we are today with our group complexes and prejudices "showing."

I suggested, at New Orleans and Chicago, that this didn't make sense.

Let me illustrate.

Group A doesn't like Group B.

Group B returns the compliment.

If you're a social scientist—a fancy word which just means you try to understand what makes people tick—you can often find the reason why Group A doesn't like Group B, or why Group B—if taken over in the corner—has been known to have its own opinion about the people in Group A. The reasons, locally or on a global scale, will be varied. But they can usually be identified as part and parcel of the times. in which we all live. The reasons in 1792 were thus and thus; in 1955 they have new motivations. Remove the reason for the mistrust—remove the specific reasons for Group A's mistrust of Group B—and you've sometimes got a case of "boy meets girl."

What I don't understand, however, is the bland assumption that we will carry with us into the golden, streamlined, multiple-galaxied Tomorrows the fears, hatreds, and suspicions which are a part of our own times. Are we only going to half grow up? With the causes removed, are the diseases still to persist?

But I've strayed off on a tangent.

Science fiction, as a field, demands more from its readers than blind—or bland—acceptance of any random corn dished out under the

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all-inclusive label. Speculative and scientific science fiction, to distinguish it from certain other variants —remember when Mickey Spillane discovered SF?—demands wider reading, solider reading. Sit down with Sprague de Camp sometimes (I hope you have his LOST CONTINENTS, 1954, Gnome Press), with writers like Fletcher Pratt, Willy Ley, Theodore Sturgeon and still others. Historians, scientists, thinkers—these are the men who, more than some of you readers may realize, have added stature and dignity to the field.

Basil Davenport's excellent INQUIRY INTO SCIENCE FICTION (Longmans, Green and Co.), is therefore doubly recommended reading. A survey of principally modern SF, Davenport's INQUIRY discusses both scientific and speculative science fiction, Science Fiction and the Emotions, "Space Operas, Mad Scientists, and Bug-Eyed Monsters," and "The Future of Science Fiction."

The author points out that "We live in a world where nothing is certain except change; but we can try to imagine the effects of certain changes and whether or not we like them, and then can even perhaps try to work for or against them."

"Man and society are of course so closely connected that a change in the character of either one must lead to a corresponding change in the other," Davenport writes, discussing present-day authors "more given to social extrapolation" and the attitude of writers in Scientific Science Fiction, willing "to entertain any hypothesis, combined with an insistence on logic and on verification if possible." The contrast between "the natural equalitarianism of most scientists" and the "chauvinism of Earth in the space opera," is brought out.

Summing up, he writes:

"This fantasy fiction, and the science fiction that is fantasy in all but name, are already giving us the myths of our generation. A myth may be defined as a story which contains a truth, not in the manner of a fable, which illustrates a truth by anecdote, nor in the manner of an allegory, which translates a truth into other terms, but in the very nature of the story itself. In the great myths, like Baldur and the Mistletoe or Kafka's *The Castle* or Stapledon's *Last and First Men,* no sort of translation is possible. You feel an inner meaning, but it cannot be expressed in other terms than in those of the story itself."

"Myths today are being written in this form of imaginative writing. In discussing *R.U.R.* I tried to show how many myths it recalls or re-states. The same thing is true with all the deepest science fiction. That Man is a creature with awesome potentialities for achievement and for self-destruction, and that the inhabitants of Earth are not the only powers in the universe—these are truths that men have never been able to forget for more than a gen-

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eration or two. It is science fiction which is telling them to us now."

Read Davenport's INQUIRY INTO SCIENCE FICTION! Better still—buy it! Jimmy Taurasi's excellent "Fantasy Times" commented on what it felt was the high price of the book. My advice to you is to make sure your library has it—and if not, why not? Read it as soon as you can and *then* go down to your local bookstore, or still better, write to the publishers, putting down the two and a half dollars the publishers have to ask for the book. Yes—*have* to ask! Printing and production costs, plus a small printing, made that price necessary. But Davenport's INQUIRY INTO SCIENCE FICTION is a "must" in any comprehensive library of SF!

Cyril M. Kornbluth's able NOT THIS AUGUST (Doubleday) and Jerry Sohl's somewhat less able POINT ULTIMATE (Rinehart), published within months of each other, represent an interesting plot departure in the field. The appearance of two novels, so closely together, describing what could happen in the event of our surrender to Communism, perhaps represents a trend and certainly represents SF's willingness to, as Davenport puts it, "plot the curve that will be traced if some tendency in our present society increases to its logical extreme." Where Kornbluth and Sohl do differ is in the effectiveness of their portraits of Occupied America. And neither novel is perhaps science fiction in the Campbellian sense of the word.

Jerry Sohl's hungry and grim Occupied United States of 1999, thirty years after the enemy H-bombs had wiped out Washington and Chicago, is vividly drawn, as are his Director Alfred Gniessin, collaborationist Tisdail, and others. Emmet Keys, of Spring Creek, Illinois, may not be the most convincing hero of the year, but he makes an interesting contribution to the resistance movement. For further details, read POINT ULTIMATE!

Kornbluth, co-author with Frederik Pohl of the important THE SPACE MERCHANTS (Ballantine) and of GLADIATOR-AT-LAW (Ballantine), discussed last month, describes an Occupied United States in 1965, the territory East of the Mississippi under Soviet Military Government and the states West of the Mississippi administered by the Chinese. Gribble, Justin, Sparhawk, Betsy, Hollerith, Feinblatt and the rest, are live people. They don't posture. There are no mildly unconvincing heroics. These are normal and quite credible people, faced by the collapse of everything that has meant so much to them throughout their lives, reacting the way they would act, fighting the way they would fight, and dying as they would die! NOT THIS AUGUST is definitely recommended.

Remember Wilson Tucker's excellent THE LONG LOUD SILENCE (1952, Rinehart)? Rinehart has

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just brought out another Wilson Tucker, TIME BOMB, which describes the search for the man or men, from the present or from the future, who had an unfortunate habit of bombing into nothingness the leaders of a certain Senator's jingoistic "Sons of America" party. Lieutenant Danforth of the bomb squad, Illinois Security Police, and Telepath Police Official Ramsey collaborate in the hunt for the man or men, from just around the corner or perhaps from the day after tomorrow, who don't appreciate "Ben's Boys." The role that Gilgamesh plays in all this is pure Tucker. Recommended.

The witty, the urbane, and sometimes overly civilized Dr. Lin Yu-tang, explores an escape from a rather dreary Tomorrow in his LOOKING BEYOND (Prentice Hall).

The world of 2004 is a world where they build buildings "underground, thirty floors below" in the effort to "escape atom bombs. A complete underground city, with elevators and streets and all that." They've also tried to grow gardens underground, "but not very successfully." Despite artificial sunlight and all sorts of chemical fertilizer fluids, "it's never quite the same." The flowers don't cooperate . . . Barbara Maverick's world is one where "there is much more pasture land available since most buildings are built underground. A few people refuse stubbornly to go under. But everything is so much more convenient with modern inventions and facilities" down among the people with the "subterranean outlook."

People do come up to the ground surface sometimes, "for a stroll or a whiff of fresh air," but "things are apt to be a little seedy-looking on the surface, with long stretches of country, and not a house in sight."

This is partly the world which Barbara Maverick, of the Geodetic Survey, Division of World Food and Health, Democratic World Commonwealth, turns her back on forever when she stumbles on the island colony, established by Laos, who'd found others who agreed with him that "we may not disobey the laws of Nature with impunity." The colony was a sophisticated Hellenist's answer to the threatened collapse of a civilization he felt had run amuck.

Recommended—to those of you who may sometimes agree with Laos.

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replay

by . . . Dal Stivens

A bluff in the animal kingdom can be a big stick—if you know how to use your wisdom teeth.

A RATHER introspective young donkey startled his father by saying, "Why, yes, I'm sure it could be done now!"

"What can be done, son?"

"Getting away with the lion's skin," said the young ass. "I'm sure we could fool them now."

"What makes you think that, pray?" asked his father. "Once bitten, twice shy, should be the lesson we asses should draw from that earlier experience."

"He wasn't bitten," said the young ass scornfully. "He was beaten. He brayed and people knew he wasn't a lion. They belted him with sticks."

"Beaten or bitten, it was painful enough," said the father.

Undeterred, the young ass procured a lion's skin. He put it on and trotted up and down.

"Fine feathers!" scoffed the father.

"Fur!" said the young ass, curling his lip.

"Feathers or fur!" said the old ass. "Now, let us hear your roar!"

The young ass opened his mouth but instead of the bray his father

Two or three times before we've bestowed a very unusual encomium on Dal Stivens. We've referred to him as a kind of twentieth-century La Fontaine, with a puckish modernity in the cut of his cape which would have startled and delighted the great French fabulist. That encomium we must bestow again, even at the risk of seeming repetitious. We must do so because this utterly enchanting small yarn so completely *illustrates what we had in mind.*

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confidently anticipated a full-blooded lion roar thundered forth. The old ass was so startled he sat down hard on his stern and blinked his eyes for half a minute before gasping: "It was a roar!"

"Why not?" said the young ass, lightly. "It pays to advertise but you must deliver the goods."

The old ass thought of countering with, "Empty vessels make the most sound," but curiosity got the better of him. So he swallowed his words and asked instead: "But I can't understand how you were able to roar?"

"New days, new ways," said the young ass. "I've been studying lions." He roared again. "No lion could do better."

"Pride goes before a fall," said the old ass.

"Sweet grass tastes like docks in the mouths of the old," said the young ass. "Never venture, never win."

"The proof of the hay is in the eating," said the father. "Let us have more deeds and fewer words."

The young ass set off for the nearest village. On its outskirts he met a dog. Instead of running away, the dog eyed the ass idly.

"Why don't you run?" asked the ass.

"Why should I?" asked the dog, boredly. "If you had come up roaring then it would have been correct to run. Besides, how am I to know you aren't an ass in a lion's skin? It has happened before, you know."

"This is how you know," said the young ass and opened his mouth and roared.

"Okay, okay, you're a lion," said the dog and took to his heels.

He went only a quarter of a mile. He sat up, scratched himself and ruminated, "It was as well to be cautious. But I'm positive that was no lion but an ass in a lion skin. I'll go and tell my master."

The dog ran fast and met his master. "Master, there's a silly ass back there masquerading as a lion," said the dog. "Get your stick."

"That I will," said the dog's master. "I'll beat the impudent fellow for trying to deceive people with such a stale trick."

The master and the dog had gone only a little way when the ass came trotting along the road, roaring.

"My fine ass, you'll soon feel the weight of my stick!" cried the villager and ran forward.

"And my teeth!" cried the dog.

The man swung his stick. The ass opened his mouth wide, roared loudly, and bit the man hard on the arm. The man yelled with the pain and dropped his stick.

The villager fled. He ran very hard for half a mile, with the dog following, before he stopped.

"What did you run for, master?" asked the dog. "It was only an ass."

"That may well be," said the villager. "But he bit like a lion."

"But I can prove it was an ass if you'll allow me a few words," said the dog.

"Deeds are what count," said the master and began to beat the dog.

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wild flower

by . . . John Wyndham

It was the loveliest flower Miss Fray had ever seen. And it brought with it a promise of peace on Earth—and a brighter tomorrow.

Not Miss Felicity Fray.

Let others jerk awake to an alarm, scramble from bed, scrub away the clinging patina of sleep with a face-flannel, hunt out the day's clothes, watch the percolator impatiently, urge the toast to pop up more quickly. Let them chew briskly, swallow gulpily, and hurry, arms and legs reciprocating briskly, on their ways.

Let these automata, with batteries regenerated, respond with spry efficiency to the insistent eye of the new day's sun, and let them greet the morning with resolution in heel and toe, a high-tensile gleam in the eye, and set off to make their new deals, new conquests . . .

But not Felicity Fray.

For today is part of yesterday. And yesterday and today are parts of being alive. And being alive is not just an affair of the days going *clonk-clonk-clonk* like the pendulum of a grandfather clock. Being alive is something continuous that does not repeat, something that one should be aware of all the time, sleeping and waking.

It may not last much longer.

John Wyndham, whose triffids *have established themselves in the popular imagination as quite the most hideous entities in present-day science fiction here brings us a fantasy creation wholly star-bright and enchanting. And if you were to meet Miss Felicity Fray on a quiet English lane tomorrow we're sure you'd recognize her, for the richly poetic quality of Mr. Wyndham's prose and his gifts as a storyteller have made her unforgettable.*

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There is no savor in hurry; so Miss Fray did not hurry; she did not jerk or bounce into the beginning of her day. About dawn she started to drift from dream through half-dream to day-dream, and lay unmoving, listening to the birds, watching the sky lighten, becoming aware of the day as it became aware of itself.

For more than an hour she lay hovering this and that side of the misty edge of sleep. Sometimes the sounds in her ears were real birds singing, sometimes they were remembered voices speaking. She enjoyed them both, smiling in her half-sleep.

By the time the day began to win her certainly from the night the birds were almost silent. They had done with the greeting, and started on the business of looking for food. She was quite abruptly aware that the world was almost noiseless.

There was an alarming feeling of unreality. She held her breath to listen for some reassuring sound. Supposing it had all stopped, now —as it might do one day?

Perhaps, even at this moment, there were in some parts of the world great columns of smoke writhing upwards in Medusan coils, swelling out at the top into cerebral convolutions that pulsed with a kind of sub-life, marking the beginning of the silence that meant the end of everything.

For years now, when she was off her guard, those pillars of smoke had been likely to start up in her mind. She hated and feared them. They were the triumphant symbol of Science.

Science was, perhaps, wonderful, but, for Miss Fray, it was a wonder of the left hand. Science was the enemy of the world that lived and breathed. It was a crystalline formation on the harsh naked rock of brain, mindless, insensitive, barren, yet actively a threat, an alien threat that she feared as un-understandingly as an animal fears fire. Science, the great anti-biotic.

So Felicity listened unhappily.

A bird called, and was answered.

That was not enough.

She went on listening for more reassurance.

In the farmyard several fields away, a tractor coughed, stuttered, and then ran more steadily, warming up.

She relaxed, relieved to be sure that the world was still alive. Then she faintly frowned her ungrateful contempt for the tractor, and pushed it out of her consciousness.

It, too, was a manifestation of science, and unwelcome.

She withdrew among her thoughts. She resurrected stored moments and magical glimpses, and remembered golden words. She landscaped her own Arcady which knew no Science.

The tractor throbbed more briskly as it trundled out of the yard, the sound of it diminishing to a purr as it crossed the fields, unheard by Felicity.

There was plenty of time.

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Enough to take the field-path way to school, and not to hurry over it.

The sun was climbing, a medallion pinned on a deepening blue cloak. Later on, the day would be hot, but now it was fresh, with a touch like a cool, white-fingered hand. Refractile gems still trembled on the leaves and stalks.

Beads from the shaken grass ran down her legs, showered on the white canvas shoes, fell like kisses on her feet.

Cows, coming out from the sheds with their udders relieved, but still slow and patient, stared at her with incurious curiosity, and then turned away to tear the grass, and munch in thoughtless rumination.

A lark, high up, trilled to mislead her from its nest, and a young blackbird, looking puffy and overfed, eyed her cautiously from the hedge.

A light draught of summer wind blew through her cotton frock, caressing her with cobweb fingers.

Then there was a muttering in the sky; then a roaring that rumbled back and forth in the vault; then a shrieking over her head, a battering at the ears and the senses, not to be shut out. The present assaulting her, bawling unignorably, frighteningly through its jet-mouths. Science on the wing.

Felicity put her hands to her ears and rocked her head. The outrage hurtled close above, sound-waves clashing together, buffeting, and reeling back.

It passed, and she uncovered her ears again. With tears in her eyes she shook her fist at the fleeing shriek of the jets and all they represented, while the air still shuddered about her.

The cows continued to graze.

How comfortable to be a cow. Neither expecting nor regretting; having no sense of guilt, nor need for it. Making no distinctions between the desirable and undesirable works of men; able to flick them, like the flies, aside with the swish of a tow-ended tail.

The shriek and the rumble died in the distance. The shattered scene began to reintegrate behind it, still for a while bloom-brushed and bruised, but slowly healing.

One day there would be too much bruising; too much to recover from.

"Intimations of mortality," said Miss Fray, to herself. "So many little deaths before the big one. How silly I am to suffer. Why should I feel all these pangs of guilt for other people? I am not responsible for this. I am not even much afraid for myself. Why do I have to be so hurt by fear for all and everything?"

A thrush sang in the spinney beyond the hedge.

She paused to listen.

Unguent, sweet notes they were.

She walked on, becoming aware again of the silk-fringed zephyrs on her cheeks, the sun on her arms, the dew on her feet.

As Felicity opened the door the hive-murmur beyond sank into silence.

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The rows of pink-cheeked faces framed in long hair, short hair, plaits, some of it morning-tidy, some of it already waywardly awry, were all turned towards her. The bright eyes were all fixed on her face.

"Good morning, Miss Fray," they all said, in unison, and silence fell as completely as before.

She could feel the suppressed expectation in the air as they watched her. There was something she must respond to. She looked for it. Her glance went round the familiar room until it reached her desk. There it stopped, where a small glass vase held a single flower.

The rows of eyes switched from her to the desk, and then back again. She walked slowly across and sat down in her chair, her gaze never leaving the strangely beautiful bloom.

It was something she had never seen before. She was quite unable to classify it, and she looked at it for a long time.

It was more complex than the simpler field flowers, yet not sophisticated. The colors were clear, but not primaries. The shape was comely, but without garden-bred formality. The ground-color of the petals was a pale pink, flushing a little at the over-rolled edges, paling to cream further back. Then there was the flush-color again, powder-stippled at first, then reticulated, then solid as it narrowed into the trumpet, but split by white spurs of the center veins.

There was just a suggestion of orchis about it, perhaps, but it was no kind of orchis she had ever seen, alive or pictured. The petal curves were sweet natural roundings, like limbs, or water cascading, or saplings bent in the wind. The texture was depthlessly soft.

Felicity leaned closer, gazing into the velvet throat. Little crescent-shaped stamens faintly dusted with pollen trembled on green, hair-like stalks. She caught the scent of it. A little sweetness, a little sharpness, a little earthiness, blended with a subtlety to make a perfumer's art vulgar and banal.

She breathed in the scent again, and looked into the flower hypnotized, unable to take her eyes from it, loving it in its brave delicacy with a sweet, longing compassion.

She had forgotten the room, the eyes that watched her, everything but the flower itself.

A fidgeting somewhere brought her back. She lifted her head, and looked unhurriedly along the rows of faces.

"Thank you," she said. "It's a beautiful flower. What is it?"

Seemingly, no one knew.

"Who brought it?" Felicity asked them.

A small, golden-headed child in the middle of the second row pinked a little.

"I did, Miss Fray."

"And you don't know what it is, Marielle?"

"No, Miss Fray. I just found it, and I thought it was pretty, and I

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thought you'd like it," she explained, a trifle anxiously.

Felicity looked back to the flower again. "I do like it, Marielle. It's lovely. It was very kind of you to think of bringing it for me."

She loitered over the flower a few seconds more, and then moved the vase decisively to the left of the desk. With an effort she turned her eyes away from it, back to the rows of faces.

"One day," she said, "I'll read you some William Blake—'To see a World in a Grain of Sand, And a Heaven in a Wild Flower . . .' But now we must get on, we've wasted too much time already. I want you to copy out what I write on the board, in your best handwriting."

She picked up the chalk and thought for a moment, looking at the flower. Then she went over to the blackboard, and wrote: "Their colors and their forms, were then to me an appetite; a feeling and a love . . ."

"Marielle. Just a moment," Felicity said.

The child paused and turned back as the others streamed out of the room.

"Thank you very much for bringing it. Was it the only one?" Felicity asked her.

"Oh, no, Miss Fray. There were three or four clumps of them."

"Where, Marielle? I'd like to get a root of it, if I can."

"On Mr. Hawkes's farm. In the top corner of the big field, where the long bright ship from the sky crashed," the child told her.

"Where the airplane crashed," Felicity repeated.

"Yes, Miss Fray."

Felicity sat down slowly, staring at the flower. The child waited, and shifted from one foot to the other.

"Please, may I go now, Miss Fray?"

"Yes," said Felicity, without looking up. "Yes, of course."

Feet scuttered out of the room.

Felicity went on looking at the flower.

"Where the ship from the sky crashed." That had been almost a year ago—on a summer's evening when all the world was quietening and settling down for the night. 'Now fades the glimmering landscape on the sight, and all the air a solemn stillness holds.' Then the airplane, wheeling its droning flight, destroying the peace.

It was a silver-paper cross up in the sky where the sunlight was still bright. Unusually, Felicity looked up. She tried to ignore the noise and her prejudices, for the craft had, undeniably, a silver-moth beauty of its own.

She watched it turn, the sunset glistering the undersides of the wings as it tilted. Then, suddenly, amid the silver there had been a flash of rose-red fire, and the silver moth ceased to exist. Pieces of glittering foil were spreading apart and falling. The largest piece trailed smoke above it, like a black funeral plume.

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A great crack slapped at her ears.

The pieces twisted and flashed in the sky as they came, some fast, some slower. The biggest of all seemed to be falling straight towards her. Perhaps she screamed. She threw herself on the ground, arms clutched over her head and ears, willing to sink herself into the earth itself.

There were interminable second-fractions of waiting while the silver wreckage came hurtling down the sky, and Felicity and all the world about her held their breath.

The solid ground bounced under her. Then came the crash, and the shrieking of metal.

Felicity looked up, biting fearfully on her hand.

She saw the silver body, a crumpled fish-shape, less than a hundred yards away, and in that moment petals of flame blossomed round it.

Something else fell close by.

She cringed close to the earth again.

Something in the main body blew up. Bits of metal whirred like pheasants over her, and plopped around.

Presently she risked raising her head again. The wreck was a cone of flame with black smoke above. She could feel the warmth on her face. She did not dare to stand up lest something else should explode and send jagged metal fragments slicing into her.

She had been still there, clinging to the earth and crying, when the crash-parties arrived and found her.

Shock, they had said, shock and fright. They had treated her for that, and then sent her home.

She had cried for the destruction, for the fire and smoke, the noise and confusion of it. And she had cried too, for the people who had died in it, for the wanton futility of it.

They kept her in bed a few days, with instructions to rest and relax. But it was difficult to relax when things kept on going round and round in one's head.

"Oh, God," she prayed, "won't You stop them? It isn't *their* world to do as they like with. It's Your world, and mine—the heart's world that they are destroying with their mind's world. Please, God, while there is still time. You destroyed their presumption at Babel, won't You do it again, before it's too late?"

Felicity remembered the prayer as she sat at her desk, looking at the beautiful flower.

They had put a fence round the place where the airplane had crashed, and set guards, too, to keep people away. Inside it, men in overall suits prowled and prowled, searching, listening, watching counters.

Cobalt was the trouble, they said. She had wondered how that could be. But it was not the artist's cobalt they wanted. The scientists had taken even the deep blue color of the sea, and had done something deadly to that, too, it appeared.

Though not altogether, not necessarily, deadly, Miss Simpson who

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taught science at the High School had explained to her. The airplane had been carrying some radio-active cobalt intended for a hospital somewhere in the Middle East. In the crash, or perhaps in the first explosion, the lead box that kept it safe had been broken open. It was extremely dangerous, and had to be recovered.

"How? Dangerous?" Felicity had wanted to know.

And Miss Simpson had told her something of the effects of gamma-rays on living matter.

Several weeks had passed before the searching men were completely satisfied, and went away. They had left the fence, no longer guarded, simply as a mark to indicate the piece of ground that was not to be ploughed this season. The ground had been left free to grow what it would.

And out of the noise, the destruction, the fire, the deadly radiations, had sprung the lovely flower.

Felicity went on looking at the flower for a long time in the silent room. Then she raised her eyes, and glanced along the rows of desks where the bright faces had been.

"I see," she said, to the emptiness and the unseen. "I am weak. I have had too little faith."

She had a disinclination to revisit the site of the crash alone. She asked Marielle to come with her on Saturday and show her where the flowers grew.

They climbed by a cool path through the woods, crossed a stile and the pasture beyond it. When they came to the enclosure, its fence already pushed flat in several places, they found a man already within it. He wore a shirt and blue jeans, and was engaged in unslinging a heavy cylinder from his back.

He laid the thing carefully on the ground and pulled out a large spotted handkerchief to wipe his face and neck. He turned as they approached, and grinned amiably. Felicity recognized him as the farmer's second son.

"It's hot work carrying three or four gallons on your back this weather," he explained apologetically, wiping the handkerchief down his arms so that the golden hairs stood up and glinted in the sunlight.

Felicity looked at the ground. There were five or six small clumps of the flowers growing in the weeds and grass, one of them half-crushed under the cylinder.

"Oh," said Marielle, in distress. "You've been killing them—killing the flowers. They're what we came for."

"You can pick 'em, and welcome," he told her.

"But we wanted some roots, to grow them," Marielle told him woefully. She turned to Felicity unhappily. "They're such pretty flowers, too."

"Pretty enough," agreed the man, looking down at them. "But there it is. Can't have this lot seeding all over the rest, you see."

"You've poisoned them all—

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every one?" Marielle asked miserably.

The man nodded. "I'm afraid they're done for now, for all they still look all right. If you had let me know . . . But it's too late now. But they'll do you no harm to pick," he explained. "It isn't poison in the old way, you see. Something to do with hormones, whatever they are. Doesn't knock 'em out, as you might say. It just sends 'em all wrong in the growing so they give up. Wonderful what the scientific chaps get hold of these days. Never know what they'll bring out next, do you?"

Felicity and Marielle gathered little bunches of the doomed flowers. They still looked as delicately beautiful and still had their poignant scent. At the stile Marielle stopped and stood looking sadly at her little bunch.

"They're so lovely," she said mournfully, with tears in her eyes.

Felicity put an arm round her. "They are lovely," she agreed. "They're very lovely—and they've gone. But the important thing is that they came. It was a gift to us from a wiser world. That's the wonderful thing. There'll be some more —some day—somewhere. We must never doubt it."

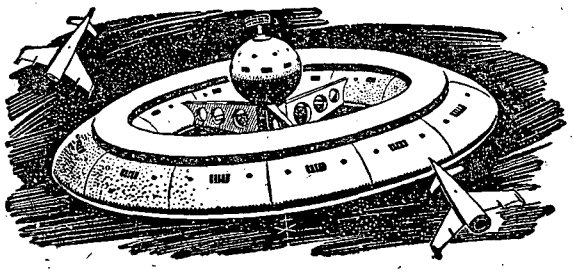
A jet came shrieking suddenly, close over the hilltop. Marielle put her hands over her ears. Felicity stood watching the machine shrink among the cream and rumble of protesting air. She held up her little posy of flowers to the blast.

"This is your answer," she said. "This. You bullies, with your vast clubs of smoke—this is greater than all of you."

Marielle took down her hands. "I hate them—I hate them," she said, her eyes on the vanishing speck.

"I hate them, too," agreed Felicity. "But now I'm not afraid of them any more. I have found a remedy, an elixir:

It is a wine of virtuous powers;
My mother made it of wild flowers."



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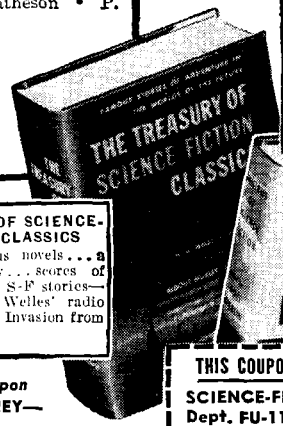

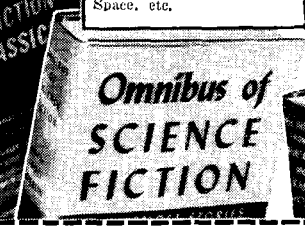

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